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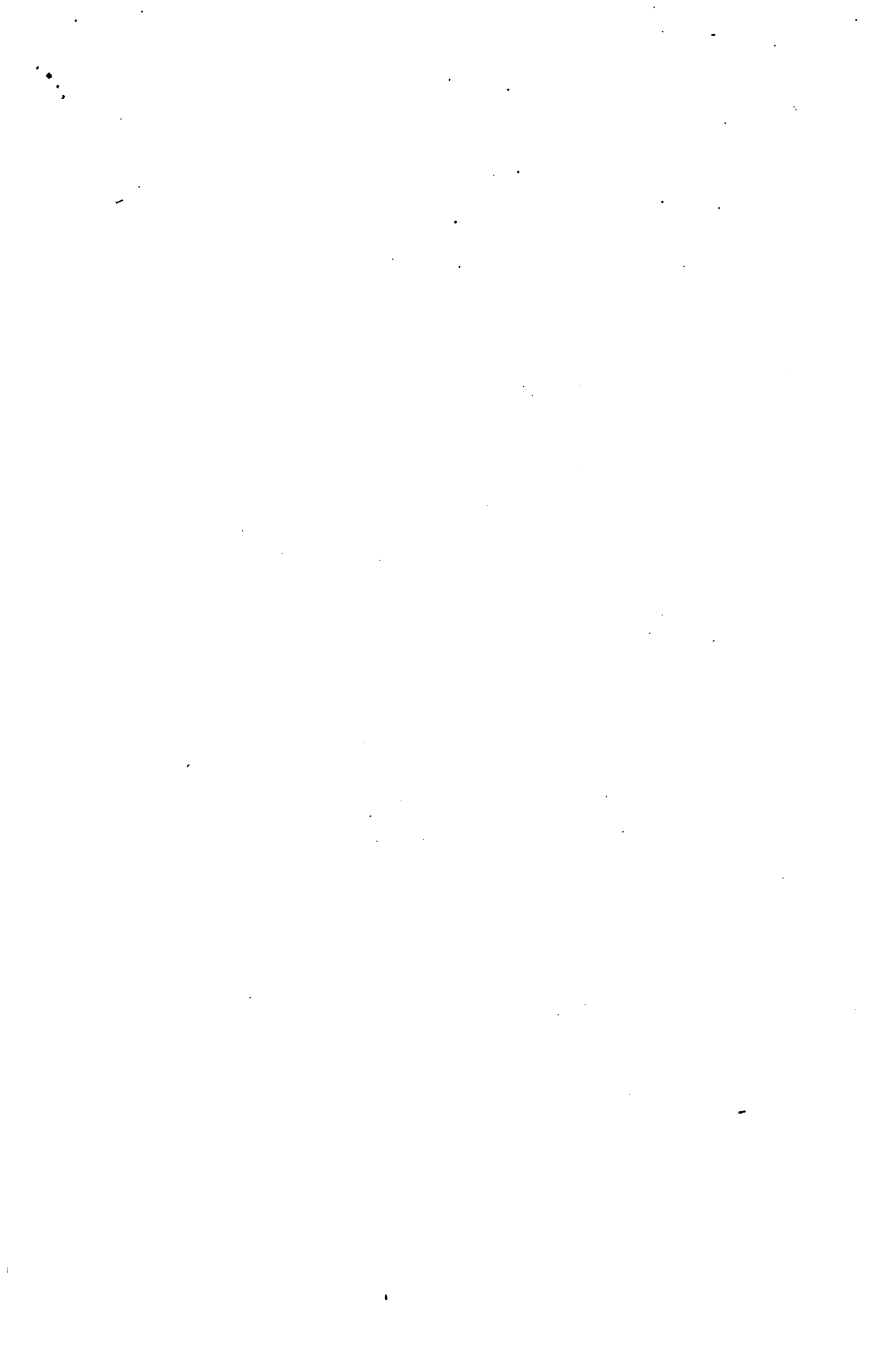
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PRINCESS CLYTIE

THE LOST PRINCESS

BY

WILLIAM FREDERICK DIX

Author of "The Fate in the Strand."

NEW YORK

MOFFAT, YARD & COMPANY

1907



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THE LOST PRINCESS

BY
WILLIAM FREDERICK DIX
Author of "*The Face in the Girandole*"

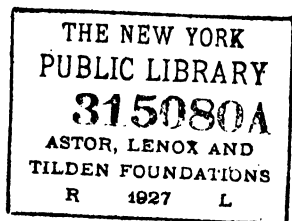
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE . . .	3
II. WHO IS ALTHEA DE BEAUPRE? . . .	31
III. A ROYAL GUEST ABOARD MY YACHT . . .	43
IV. THE DRYAD OF VILLA CLYTIE	59
V. THE SECRET OF THE LABORATORIES . . .	71
VI. SUNSHINE AND MOONLIGHT IN ARCADY . .	83
VII. THE LOST PRINCESS	99
VIII. IN THE TERRACED GARDENS OF ISOLA PICCOLA	111
IX. WHEN THE FOG LIFTED	127
X. PRINCE RAFAEL BECOMES MY JAILER . . .	137
XI. A GAME OF BILLIARDS	149
XII. RAFAEL PREPARES FOR WAR	159
XIII. THE MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL . . .	167
XIV. "A FIGHTING CHANCE FOR A MAN LIKE You"	185
XV. THE LONG RIDE	199
XVI. THE FLAG IN THE FOREST	211
XVII. THE APPARITION ON THE BATTLE FIELD .	221
XVIII. HOW KING THEOCRITE TURNED THE TIDE OF BATTLE	235

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. THE PRINCESS CLYTIE SALUTES THE NEW GENERAL	247
XX. THE RETURN IN TRIUMPH TO BELOPOLIS .	261
XXI. KING ERNEST TAKES THE HINT . . .	269
XXII. ROMANCE COMES BACK TO MONVERTO HALL	281
XXIII. THE POMP AND PANOPLY OF PEACE . .	287

*THE FLIGHT FROM MALVERS
PALACE*

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THE LOST PRINCESS

CHAPTER I

THE FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

As we sat around the card table in an upper room in the palace, with the electric lights sparkling in the cut-glass chandeliers, glinting on old Klauber's medals and the General's blue-black hair and mustache and lighting up the ancient portraits on the tapestried walls, the door behind me opened softly and I saw, reflected in a mirror, an orderly appear and make a slight sign to my partner, Baron Cassel, who suddenly threw down his cards and, presenting with equal rapidity a revolver in my face across the table, exclaimed:

"Your game is up, you Belmanian spy! Don't move or I'll blow your brains out!"

In the fraction of a second before I dived under the table I saw the astounded faces of the two other officers. Then, from underneath it, I hurled the table over so that it caught Cassel under the chin and fell with a

THE LOST PRINCESS

crash upon Count Klauber, and at the same moment I seized the General by the ankles and threw him over backward. Cassel's pistol went off and I heard the General groan. In the confusion I leaped over my prostrate enemies and switched off the electric light from a button on the wall. The orderly rushed forward only to fall over the others, and I dashed for the door opposite the one which he had entered and through it, into the bedroom adjoining. Upon the bed which stood directly in front of me, lay the Prince's Aide-de-Camp, reading. He had started up at the sudden noise and as I leaped directly over him, my spur caught in a corner of the spread which covered him, throwing me to the floor.

The others were crowding into the room as I picked myself up and I tore out of the door into a narrow corridor. Fortunately the Aide had left his key in the keyhole outside, and I turned this and began a lightning descent of the four flights of the steep, stone, service stairway which opened near by. Fortunately only the pastry cook was upon it, puffing slowly up as I descended, and I heard his startled snort as I whizzed past. My sword caught

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

between his feet and tripped him so that he fell forward on his protruding paunch and slid down several steps, and I heard him cry, "Il diavolo! Terror and Death!" Then the door which I had locked, gave away with a crash and I heard the others trooping after me, shouting at the top of their voices. The stairs were spiral, my spurs were shorter than theirs, and I almost slid down the flights, keeping close to the inside where the steps narrowed to a point, so that my descent was well-nigh perpendicular.

At the foot of the fourth flight, which brought me to the main floor on which were the State apartments, I thought to throw my pursuers off the track by dodging down the great corridor toward the new wing now partly completed. But by ill-luck two of the guards happened to be at the head of the great marble staircase and the Prince himself was just going out, dressed in mufti and probably upon one of his disreputable midnight escapades. They all stopped short as they saw a tall, slender, light-haired young fellow, dressed in the full uniform of a colonel of artillery, — a uniform which I had worn for several weeks with secret disgust; — appear from the ser-

THE LOST PRINCESS

vants' staircase, hatless and evidently in full flight from something.

But the shouts which were heard from above, "A spy! A Belmanian spy! Stop him!" startled them still more. The Prince and his attendants stood directly between me and a window at the end of the great picture-lined hall opening into the unfinished wing. As I dashed toward them, His Serene Highness lost his serenity and laid his hand on his sword. I had already slipped past the guards and I landed with my fist square on his royal chin, sending him reeling against the statue of his great grandfather. As I raced down the hall, revolver shots rang out and a piece of marble from a statue close by me rattled to the floor. I saw that the window ahead of me was open and a few highly finished oak planks for the wainscoting in the unfinished apartment beyond were tilted out from the sill, their other ends resting on the floor outside. I was racing so fast down the corridor with the two guards in hot pursuit, that I launched myself head first out through the window and slid on my face, down the inclined planks to the shavings littered floor.

Living for weeks as I had done in the full

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

knowledge that an occurrence such as this might take place at any moment, — for my mission to the enemy's very stronghold was no boy's errand, — I had studied every possible avenue of escape. So I picked myself up and made unerringly across the apartment, avoiding skilfully the kegs of nails, and the work benches, amid a fusillade of bullets. I smashed the great stained glass window in the rear wall with a saw-horse which I hurled through it, and, once outside, crept like a cat along the top of the cornice, from which I could drop to the soft turf of the garden below.

This new wing extended to the rear of the main building in the form of an ell into the royal gardens, and as I slipped down the grassy terrace, moist with dew, and sped along the gravel path toward the little marble gazebo or pavilion, I realized that my flight had only been successful in that I was not yet actually caught. I had not given my angry pursuers the slip and they were hot upon my clearly marked trail. Already I could hear steps on the gravel behind me. The night was somewhat dark as the moon was obscured by clouds. The guards had evidently seen me dash out from the palace into the garden toward the

THE LOST PRINCESS

pavilion in the center, and the inference would be that I would continue down the dark, high-hedged paths beyond, to the wall in the extreme rear, and scale it by means of the grape trellis fastened upon it. Once outside, I could easily pass the guards in the public gardens, which began beyond the wall, as I was in the uniform of an officer of the realm. This would be the logical method of escape and so I determined *not* to follow a plan quite so evident.

It occurred to me that the one place in all the vicinity where I would not be expected to be, was in the palace itself from which I had just fled. So I doubled on my tracks by circling entirely around the little pavilion and crept slowly and noiselessly back toward the building, on the outside of a thick, yew hedge, completely concealed by it. My pursuers passed within a few feet of me and dashed away towards the rear of the garden. Ahead of me, beyond the trim patchwork of clipped lawns, flower-beds, hedges and clumps of foliage, lightened here and there with ancient statues, a marble pergola and a great basin in which a fountain splashed, loomed the dark, brownstone walls of the palace with many lighted windows. Excitement reigned, natu-

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

rally enough, inside. A spy from a neighboring country which was almost at warfare with theirs had been discovered in the person of what was supposed to be one of their trusted officers, who for a month had been attached to the palace staff, and he had not only escaped but had assaulted the reigning Prince in so doing.

It was to this very excitement and consequent confusion that I trusted myself, for I had another and far stronger reason in returning to the palace than merely to elude my pursuers. I felt confidence in my ability to escape, even from the very heart of the principality, but small would be the glory of my return home if I came without certain papers which were in the personal keeping of His Highness, — papers, the unfortunate possession of which by him had brought our two countries to the verge of a declaration of war.

Noiselessly creeping along behind the hedge I finally reached the new wing, which was dark and empty, and through which I had just made my rather sensational flight. Climbing a bit of scaffolding which had not been taken down, I gained the ornamental copper cornice running just below the windows of the main

THE LOST PRINCESS

floor, which was one flight up, and crept stealthily along this in the darkness to the main building. The ornaments at the outer edge of this cornice rose a foot or two and were about three feet away from the walls, thus affording me a fairly safe and dark trough along which to creep, perfectly protected from view so long as I crawled, unless some one should happen to thrust his head out of a window when I was near. Creeping around the front of the building I raised myself quickly and peered into the window of the Prince's private study. Fortunately at this place some tubs of plants, set on the outer edge of the cornice, protected me from view of any who might be in the courtyard below.

Peering in through the lace curtains of the open window, I saw an excited group of three persons. At his great mahogany center table sat the Prince, a strip of court-plaster on his chin showing the effect of my knuckles. He held in his hand the very papers which it was necessary for me to have. He was in a rage and concealed it but poorly, though he tried to appear calm and dignified.

"It is as I thought, General," he was saying to his military adviser, — him whom I had so

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

recently upset by the heels. "With these in our possession our ultimatum would be unquestionable. We will catch that dog of a Belmanian spy, with his forged letters of introduction to our person, and show them that we mean business! He will be no more prisoner of war! Mademoiselle, be good enough to put these papers in the safe again," and, handing them to the young woman across the table from him, he rose suddenly and, with the officer, left the room.

An instant later I was in through the window and had locked the door after them. Then turning to the startled woman I saluted and said:

"Mlle. de Beaupre, your pardon! Yes, I am a spy and I must have those papers!"

She arose gracefully from the table — everything she did was graceful — her dark eyes flashed and a touch of merriment rather than of fear gleamed behind them. She stood looking defiantly, half mockingly at me. I suddenly realized that I had reached the most difficult as well as the most humiliating part of my duty. If necessary I should have to take the packet, which she had seized from a table, by force. In all the group of brilliant

THE LOST PRINCESS

people whom I had met during the last few weeks, she was to me the most delightful. She was not a young girl, but a woman well versed in the ways of the world, a trifle blasé, if not cynical, but never unpleasantly so. Her wit flashed constantly but did not sting, and there was a certain repression to what might have been high spirits which had fascinated me and she had always been unusually gracious to me.

"Mademoiselle," I said, crossing to her, "I am flying now for my life, as you of course know. Every moment counts. You are clever enough to know that it is absolutely necessary for me to take that packet with me. That is why I doubled on my tracks in the garden and came here."

"And that was certainly clever in *you*," she broke in. "Who else would have thought of doing such a thing! I really quite admire you."

I looked at her blankly and she smiled in my eyes.

"I wish you could say that in another way," I said. "You don't know how I have admired you — how I admire you now. And it cuts me deeply to be rude to you. Do not, please,

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

think unkindly of me when you remember those rides we took together —”

“Not in the least I assure you,” she said, “if I should chance to remember them.”

“I shall not soon forget them,” I replied, “nor the promenades between dances in the moonlight, and if you *should* chance to recall them, please believe that I was not acting a part *then*. I am an officer in the service of my King, King Ernest of Belmania, and I am Karl, eighth Baron of Casamare. You will find the name in the Register.”

She stood leaning against the massive table, her dark wavy hair shining glossy under the soft desk-light, her simple evening gown of white contrasting with her rich coloring.

“Is this in the line of duty?” she asked, looking up at me archly.

“I must have the papers,” I cried, changing my tone, “and time is passing.”

“It certainly is,” she replied, sinking into the chair, “three minutes of it already.”

I bent over her and put my hand over hers — the one which grasped the packet.

“You see,” I said, “I am taking them from you by force. You cannot be blamed for their loss when the desperate spy breaks in through

THE LOST PRINCESS

the window, locks the door against possible help or escape for you, and wrests them from your possession."

Her hair touched my cheek, her face was close to mine as I bent over her. She turned and flashed a glance at me. It was not pensive, neither was it altogether mocking; merriment seemed to lie deep hidden in her eyes. She was certainly not in the least afraid.

"You are doing your work extremely well," she murmured, "I shall write a letter of recommendation to your King. Four weeks here with us, without anyone suspecting your real purpose, and now you are tactfulness itself! Why, it is really quite a pleasure to be held up and robbed."

The papers were in my hand. I put them in the bosom of my tunic and held out my hand to her.

"Shall we two not be friends in spite of all?" I asked, "I should be so glad!"

"Assuredly," she replied, "one doesn't often have a chance of making so interesting an one. The world is so full of commonplace people." And she put her hand in mine. I stepped to the window.

"Good night," I said, "and thank you. Till we meet again."

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

"Good night," she answered, "how soon shall I raise the alarm?"

"Swoon!" I commanded, "and stay swooned for ten minutes. Then make all the disturbance you want to. It might be well to throw in a few hysterics. Good night!"

My spirits were high as I parted the curtains and dropped softly into the copper cornice beneath the window. As I crept along in the darkness of that narrow gutter, it was as if I trod the wild flowers of fragrant meadows, for the path was the path home. The crowning achievement of my career, the capture of the papers, was accomplished, the packet was safely in my pocket, and the thought of the information which I was about to bear away in safety to my own country across the mountains exhilarated me.

The incident just enacted in the Prince's study, which gave promise of being a distressing one, had, by a stroke of good fortune, turned out happily. What a strange, delightful, mystifying woman was the Countess Althea de Beaupre, the Prince's confidential secretary! As I was thus musing, suddenly, close to my ear there burst forth in oily but frightened tones, "*Il diavolo!* the spy! Signori,

THE LOST PRINCESS

the spy! Il diavolo! and there, just above me, was the fat, frightened face of that beast of a pastry cook just withdrawing into the service stairway. He had evidently descended to his kitchen for a ration of wine in order to restore his nerves after the fall I had given him, and, climbing and puffing up-stairs again, he had thrust his pudding-like head out of the window for a breath of air at the precise moment in which I came creeping along.

"The spy Signori! The spy! The spy!" he yelled, and thrust his head again out of the window. I scooped up a handful of soaking oak leaves, collected in a corner of the copper gutter, and literally pasted them into his face. I heard a sputter and a snort and the window banged as I sped on. I no longer crept but rose and ran, for now indeed would the chase be a worthy one. Before, the alarm was of course only among a few, but now the entire city had probably been aroused and outside the palace grounds the first policeman who saw me would be after me. Already windows were opening in the palace and shouting was heard within from hall to hall.

Leaping from the cornice, down upon the top of a stone archway extending from the side

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

wall of the building across the narrow paved court to the street wall, I climbed around its statuary, crawled over the legs of a marble Neptune, fell over the tail of a dolphin, gained the wall and dropped into the side street plump upon the shoulders of a fat policeman. He rolled into the gutter with a howl and I scrambled up, tore across the narrow, cobble stone street, and in through the open door of a little bakery. An old woman was sitting in a high-backed chair in the doorway, knitting. She went over backward and her two red woollen, stocking-clad feet waved in the air. A small yellow dog lying in her lap chased, yapping at my heels as I raced up the dark, narrow stairway, but got his nose scratched on one of my spurs and suddenly discontinued the pursuit. Up I went, flight after flight to the roof and out through a skylight, then across several house-tops, trying each skylight in turn till I found one open and climbed down the ladder into a dark, empty loft. Finding a window in the rear, I opened it and slid down an earthenware leader to a shed roof, dropped from this into the back yard, scaled the brick wall into the yard in the rear of the house on the next street and, finding I had,

THE LOST PRINCESS

for the moment, eluded the palace retainers and the fat policeman, decided to gain the street above the one I had just left by passing either through or over one of the houses in the row now before me, for on that street would be waiting for me my trusty Pedro and his cab, just as he had waited every night, patiently, for several weeks. I approached the house warily, climbed to the roof of a first floor extension and found a window open on the second floor, but with its thick curtains closely drawn. I feared that there was a light behind them, but at this moment a rifle shot rang out, the glass splintered just above my head and a row of dark figures on the housetops behind me warned me to instant action.

Tearing the window curtains apart I leaped into the room. It was a bathroom and a bald-headed, gray-whiskered bourgeois was in the tub, out of which he was trying in evident alarm to scramble, for the rifle bullet had splattered on the wall near the tub, into which he sank again with a snort and a splash as I appeared. There was no time for apologies, but the humor of the situation almost unmanned me for a moment. Imagine the outraged feelings and consternation of an honest and

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

elderly grocer at this unprecedented and startling intrusion upon his evening ablutions! Should I, in my flight, enter still more intimately into the bosom of this family I wondered. But there was no time to hesitate. I sang out cheerily, "Don't forget a shampoo, my friend!" and hastily unlocked the door. There was no use in my locking it after me, he was in no condition to follow!

I found myself in a well-lighted hallway, descended the stairs, and almost ran into three young girls who had been at the piano in the little parlor, and who had run out at the sound of what they supposed was their father's unusually rapid footfalls.

"Your music is charming, ladies!" I called out gaily. "I am sorry I can't wait to hear more. Adieu!" and I tripped lightly down the front steps.

At the corner, Pedro, the faithful, was waiting, and as I stepped into the cab behind him I said, "For your life, old friend! To the Boulevard and let me catch the first electric car, but don't take too direct a route!"

"Thank Heaven, Master," he murmured. "Something to do at last!" and we whirled away. The blinds of the cab were tight drawn

THE LOST PRINCESS

and I took off my gaily laced tunic, breeches and boots, my sword and belt, and drew from under the seat a dark, rough sack suit of English tweed, brown shoes, a soft traveling cap, light overcoat and cane. My hair and mustache were light brown, and when I had completed my toilet — taking care to secure my papers and other valuables, I trimmed my long mustache close to the face by the aid of scissors, a tiny candle, and a hand mirror. When, presently, the cab drew up suddenly at the gaily lighted boulevard, there descended from it a well dressed young English tourist. Whispering my thanks and a few orders to Pedro, I swung myself aboard a passing car and, calmly seating myself inside, drew a copy of the *London Times* from my pocket and was carried through half the length of the brilliant and fashionable boulevard, gay with shops, cafés and theaters, the latter just disgorging their crowds after the evening performance.

Alighting at the Park entrance at the outskirts of the city, I strolled through it to the parade ground, beyond which rose the thickly wooded mountains. I knew that I had entirely eluded pursuit and began to feel the fatigue of what I had been through. Presently ahead

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

of me I saw a market wagon with two mules harnessed to it. A peasant in a brown cotton blouse touched his cap respectfully. It was Antonio, as I expected.

"All is well, Antonio," I said. "Now let us start for home."

The look of rapt joy and delight that overspread his rugged features was worth seeing.

"My Lord Casamare!" he said, "great will be our return! You are safe and you have what you wanted or you would not be here. Quick! let us mount and ride." He deftly unhitched the mules, drew the saddles from their hiding place in the cart, tipped the latter into the ditch, and in a moment we had plunged into the woods and the mules began the long climb over the range that led to our own dear land in the valley on the other side. No need to fear the frontier outposts, for Antonio had not scoured these rugged heights for weeks, with his own helpers for nothing.

I looked back toward the city whose glittering lights were plainly seen far below, and thought of the various incidents of my stay within its walls, of the good work I had done, of the men and women I had met, of the game I had played so well, and of Althea de Beaupre,

THE LOST PRINCESS

the capricious, fascinating woman who had bantered with me, chaffed and flirted, danced and hunted, and, at last, taken my demanding of the papers so easily — almost laughingly. How could she but rebel against the loss of papers so vital to her Prince and her country? She certainly knew how to accept the inevitable gracefully. And when, I wondered, should I see her, or the city, or my acquaintances there again?

“Signor Casamare,” said Antonio, at length, “Yonder are two other travelers ahead of us.”

I looked up from my reverie. We had risen zigzag up above the dense forests and were at the very summit of the range. The moon had come out, round and clear, and lighted up the narrow trail ahead of us. Sharp against the sky stood out two horses and riders — a man and a woman, by their garb, a mountain guide and a lady in traveling costume. Beyond them the bridle path sloped sharply to the distant valley below, where, on the great highway leading home, a powerful motor car would be waiting for me, as these other faithful ones had waited. This could not be an ambush, but nevertheless we approached warily, and presently the woman turned her face toward us and smiled.

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

It was Althea de Beaupre! Mlle. de Beaupre, a member of the Court from which I had just fled, here, alone, with her guide, on my own frontier! I was considerably startled and puzzled and I exclaimed sternly, as I dismounted and lifted my English hat:

"Mademoiselle, what does this mean?" Then I caught sight of laughter in her eyes and cried, "Are there others with you? Answer me quick!" and drew my pistols.

"We are alone, Monsieur. You need have no fears."

Her voice was so sweet and friendly that it allayed my alarm. But it trembled a little, just enough to win a man, as she continued:

"Will you forgive me if I have deceived you too, these weeks? You thought that you were the only spy in the palace, but I too am of Belmania, and a woman can find out some things that even the best spy in the country could not learn."

In an instant I understood all that she meant and realized why she so easily relinquished the papers. If she had known all along the part I was playing she would naturally not be surprised when I hurled at her the terrifying news that I was an enemy. Her

THE LOST PRINCESS

curious position at Court, a noblewoman yet acting as secretary to His Highness the Prince, was now explained, and finally the somewhat crushing realization that though I had gathered much valuable information, it was she, this slender woman beside me, who had really secured the papers and not I, robbed me of my elation.

The two guides withdrew and were chatting quietly together as I remounted my mule. Together we two rode slowly down toward the valley road below us they following at a distance.

"Why did you not tell me this before — in Malvers while I was there?" I demanded with some indignation. "Surely we could have worked together."

She laughed lightly.

"A woman's ways are always inscrutable," she replied, "and you should never attempt to question or understand them. They cannot be solved by logical methods. Are we not both here, have we not brought the packet with us, and are we not safely on the road home?"

The moon was still out, round and brilliant, and the path was clearly marked before us. There were no alarms in the rear and we were

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

well over the border. Malvers lay behind us over the top of the mountains and I began to feel more cheerful again. We chatted, not of politics while we rode, but of the amusing incidents of the night, and the ardors of my perilous mission were forgotten. I had never seen the Countess in such animated spirits, for she had usually been somewhat distant and apathetic in her demeanor. I asked her no further questions about herself and she vouchsafed no further information.

Long after midnight we reached the valley and there, waiting, was the great motor car with soft wraps and cushioned seats within. One of my officers was the volunteer chauffeur. He had been signaled from the summit of the mountains that I was coming, and delicious and much needed refreshments were prepared. I introduced him to my companion and soon Althea and I were resting luxuriously in the rear seats and the car was spinning with great velocity down the macadam valley road toward home. The night air was refreshingly cool and the city across the range seemed very far away.

"And if I hadn't captured the papers from you after going back to the palace expressly for

THE LOST PRINCESS

them, you would have taken them home?" I said, after awhile. "Here I have been doing a hippodrome performance over the entire place with the whole Malvers Palace household yelling and clattering at my heels, while, without any fuss and feathers at all, you have quietly left for home without a soul suspecting even that you are gone and have just as much information to give the King as I have!"

"It did take a little finesse on my part," she said, "to get the Prince to take those papers out of his safe to-night. I rather pride myself on the hints I threw out about them which made him want to look them over again. He was so enraged over your blow on the chin that he couldn't think about anything else for awhile. Well, it's all over now," she sighed and nestled back among the wraps beside me. "And I am going home with a hero." And she looked up at me with just a touch of that mysterious mockery in her smile.

"But what would my work have been without you?" I said.

"Do you think that *I* shall take any credit for it when we get home?" she asked.

"Do you think *I* shall?" I demanded, and then on the impulse of the moment I drew the

FLIGHT FROM MALVERS PALACE

packet from my inner pocket and laid it upon her lap. "You shall give them to the King yourself," I said.

She started slightly.

"I — oh! no indeed!" she responded quickly. "I have done my part and King Ernest sent you for the papers. Take them, please do!" and her eyes looked softly into mine.

I pressed the packet firmly into her hand. "To you shall be the honor. We will meet at the palace to-morrow morning and it will give me far more pleasure to see you give them to His Majesty than for me to do so. And now, where shall we leave you for the night?"

The Countess hesitated, then took the packet and said simply. "At the Hotel National. At what time will you go to the King to-morrow?"

"At ten o'clock," I replied.

We had been rapidly approaching the city gates. The octroi officers flashed their lanterns at us and then saluted as they recognized our uniformed chauffeur and the government automobile. We ordered them to telephone the hotel and then sped through the deserted streets. Soon we stopped at the great entrance to the Hotel National on the Rue Royale and a sleepy porter and clerk were hovering

THE LOST PRINCESS

about us as Mlle. de Beaupre held out her gloved hand to me.

“Good night,” she said, “Thanks for the packet. I appreciate it I assure you, and will take good care of it.”

“Good night,” I said, “I hope you are not too tired.”

A little later, thoroughly exhausted, I roused up my valet at my town apartments and in a few minutes was sound asleep.

WHO IS ALTHEA DE BEAUPRE?

CHAPTER II

WHO IS ALTHEA DE BEAUPRE?

THE brilliant sunshine streamed into my bedroom the next morning in a sudden flood as Hugo opened the shutters and I lay in luxurious semi-consciousness for a few minutes before I arose. With awakening thoughts came a flood of high spirits. I was back safe at home again after a trying and dangerous mission. It had been one of complete success and I pictured with a thrill of pleasure the forthcoming interview with my King. And best of all, the important documents which he had so anxiously awaited and which would mean so much to his ministers, giving them the whip hand in the unfortunate war now almost ready to burst upon the two neighbor countries, Malvers and Belmania, would be handed to him, not by myself but by the brave, clever little emissary from my own country who had lived in the enemy's stronghold as

THE LOST PRINCESS

fearless of danger as I had been. Yes, the world was full of sunshine this morning, it was fair and young and life was a goodly thing.

I made my toilet in contented leisure, glanced over some mail which had accumulated, telephoned to the Palace, making, through his Secretary, an appointment with the King for ten o'clock, had my coffee and rolls out on the balcony overlooking the boulevard, and at half-past nine my favorite charger was at the door. It was a pleasant ride that morning, as in my own uniform once more, I ambled along the boulevard and through the park to the palace grounds. Old General Bloc and his daughters in their barouche stopped for a few words of greeting. Colonel Schwarzkstein called out a cheery "Welcome home, old fellow. I hear you have good news for us." And the dear old white-haired Duchess, who always seemed to regard me as her special protégé, waved her lace handkerchief enthusiastically at me as she passed in her victoria and commanded me to take tea with her that afternoon.

Arriving at the palace, I was ushered at once into the presence of the King, who had evidently been impatiently waiting for me. And it is not many men whom a King im-

WHO IS ALTHEA DE BEAUPRE?

patiently awaits. He greeted me with his accustomed frank warmth and cordiality and with characteristically few words. He was a business man, modern to his finger tips. Young, clean shaven, dressed in simplest fatigue uniform and seated at his great mahogany, roll-top desk which was equipped with push buttons and telephone, much as a banker would sit in his office in Berlin or Paris. He was himself King albeit his realm was small. In the few years since his accession the old order of empty pomp and show had changed and his ministers and executive officers were, like himself, young men, well trained and business like. This was why, at this critical point when war hung in the balance, our entire people gave their confidence implicitly to their loved King Ernest.

"Your Majesty," I began, taking, at his gesture the chair near the desk, "I escaped from Malvers last evening. I have here complete tables of the army organization and present disposition, and all the diagrams and data which you sent me for. Allow me!" and I placed them upon his desk. His face lighted up as he eagerly opened the tissue paper sheets of statistics which I had worked at secretly

THE LOST PRINCESS

as opportunity offered in Prince Rafael's palace.

"Good! Good! Excellent!" he kept exclaiming. "Very complete and well done indeed!" He finished and looking up at me with glowing face said, "I congratulate you, Baron Casamare. And how about the Diplomatic Correspondence Packet?"

The acme of my triumph was almost reached. I glanced at the clock. It was ten minutes past ten.

"It should be here now," I replied. "The woman whom you sent also as a spy will hand it to you herself. She was to meet me here at ten o'clock."

The King raised his eyebrows.

"A woman spy?" he repeated inquiringly.

"Yes, sir; I met her last night, as we both left Malvers at the same time. She has the packet and was to meet me here this morning."

Then the bomb exploded.

"I do not know her," said the King. "You were the only spy I sent."

I looked at him blankly.

"You did not send her," I said vacantly, "then who did?"

WHO IS ALTHEA DE BEAUPRE?

"No one. You were the only spy sent," was the reply.

"Why!" I cried, "she told me herself that she came from Belmania; she was the Countess de Beaupre."

The effect of the name on King Ernest was electrical, startling. All color left his face and he sank back in the chair, glaring at me, speechless, trembling.

"Who?" he whispered hoarsely.

"The Countess Althea de Beaupre!" I repeated. "I knew her quite well while I was living in the Malvers Palace. She was Prince Rafael's confidential secretary."

The look of bewilderment on the King's face changed suddenly to one of absolute horror.

"Prince Rafael's confidential secretary!" he gasped, "Althea de Beaupre?" He rose, smoothed his hair with a passionate gesture, paced the room for a moment, then threw himself into the chair. I had never seen a man so moved before. I was evidently venturing in waters far too deep for me.

"Allow me to use your telephone a moment, Sir," I stammered, and raised the receiver which stood on the side of his desk.

"Hello! give me the Hotel National—

THE LOST PRINCESS

Manager's office. Hello! this is Baron Casamare, Captain of the First Artillery. Last night late a young woman arrived at your hotel in a Royal Service motor car — the Countess de Beaupre. Where is she now? Yes, I will hold the wire." In a moment came the reply.

"The young lady arose early this morning and ordered a public automobile for a ride down the valley and has not yet returned — Hello — one moment please, here is the chauffeur now. He says that at the foot of the pass she alighted to pick some wild flowers. She went into the woods and did not return. He waited two hours for her and then came back alone. To whom shall we charge her account please? She left no luggage."

I rang off and turned to the King, who had, by this time regained his composure. I told him what I had learned over the telephone, that the packet, which, a moment before I had expected to be brought to this room, was now, through a master-stroke of clever diplomacy, probably out of our reach across the frontier, in the possession of a woman whom I had never thought of distrusting. Then I told him in detail of my life at the palace; my acquaintance with the Countess de Beaupre, my escape,

WHO IS ALTHEA DE BEAUPRE?

when my true mission there was discovered, how I had returned to it and secured from the seemingly willing hands of the Prince's confidential secretary the packet, and had later met her, evidently fleeing from Malvers also, at the top of the pass; how, after a few suggestions from her, I had been so easily duped into thinking that she was a compatriot of mine, working for the same cause as I, and so, out of mistaken chivalry, I had given her the papers so that she herself might hand them to King Ernest.

"She certainly was clever," I concluded ruefully, "for she saw that it was useless to try to keep the papers from me when we were in the Prince's study, and she hit upon the only possible way of regaining them. She even pretended to take them back with reluctance when I pressed them upon her in the motor car — she said she would much prefer to have me keep them! I had to insist on her taking them!"

During this narration, King Ernest listened without saying a word. Save for the agitation he had showed when I mentioned the name of Althea de Beaupre, he evidenced no trace of disappointment, chagrin, or vexation with me as I told the story. But when I had finished, I

THE LOST PRINCESS

considered that my humiliation was complete for I had failed absolutely, and through sheer carelessness, in achieving the chief aim in an undertaking of the highest importance which my King could have intrusted to me to do.

After a short pause, the King spoke.

"Althea de Beaupre is a compatriot of yours."

Then, without further explaining this surprising and mystifying statement, he continued hastily, as if half regretful at having made it:

"I do not see how I can, under the circumstances, conscientiously blame you. A part of the mission you have accomplished excellently," and he tapped the papers in front of him. "The other part is perhaps a forgivable error, for a woman's wit is usually more subtle and nimble than a man's, and you, my dear Baron, are essentially masculine," and he smiled quietly.

Never did I love and admire my King more than at this splendid example of his magnanimity, and had I yielded to the traditional impulses of my fathers I would have thrown myself at his feet and kissed his hand. As it was I arose, saluted, and said:

"Your Majesty, you know my mortification

WHO IS ALTHEA DE BEAUPRE?

and chagrin better than I can express it. I expected this interview to mark the proudest moment in my career, but I swear to you that you shall yet have those papers in your possession, if you will let me try once more and help me to redeem myself. By this time the packet is undoubtedly in Prince Rafael's hands. I believe he will not make immediate use of it. He realizes that it would be dangerous to commence this war without some outside help. I have learned that it is his intention to obtain this help from his cousin, who is Theocrite, King of Pavonia. If he can induce Theocrite to send him a few regiments in return for a slice of our land when they have taken it from us, he will feel more sure of winning. He is quite aware of the splendid military organization you have created in our armies and our preparedness for any emergency, and he realizes that, alone, he could hardly expect to succeed against us.

"So he will sail shortly on his yacht, incognito for Pavonia, and will undoubtedly carry the packet of correspondence with him to show to King Theocrite. Let me try to prevent that packet from ever reaching Pavonia."

The King's face grew serious at this new

THE LOST PRINCESS

development in the situation, and for another hour he questioned me closely and gave such hearty support to the plans I outlined to him that I left his presence with a new courage and a desperate resolve in my heart.

***A ROYAL GUEST ABOARD MY
YACHT***

CHAPTER III

A ROYAL GUEST ABOARD MY YACHT

DURING the next few days I was never at rest. In my motor I sped from Admiralty office to Army Headquarters with the King's authority behind me, and every instruction was given and carried out with the utmost secrecy. Little detachments of men and innocent looking freight wagons stole quietly away from town to our neighboring seaport, from which a little fleet of submarines presently slipped quietly away, and in a few days, after a last interview with King Ernest and a warm hand-clasp from him that redoubled my ardor, I rolled out of town early one evening in my motor car for the coast.

Before I left Belopolis I called to make my adieus to the Duchess. When the tea was brought into the drawing-room and she had dismissed the footman she said:

"Baron Karl, how long must you remain in

THE LOST PRINCESS

this dreadful secret service? I would much prefer to have you remain in the line, here with your regiment in town."

I told her some of the amusing features of my flight from Malvers, not of course divulging any secrets nor mentioning Mlle. de Beaupre. She enjoyed keenly the picture of my sliding down the planks headfirst and the picture of the old bourgeois in his tub, and admitted that I was a master hand at eluding pursuers.

"And now you are off again! Am I not to know where?" she asked.

"Oh, I am going to play pirate for awhile," I said lightly, "I am going to swashbuckle on the raging main, but I'll be back soon."

"And meanwhile the girls here will be raging because you cannot dance with them. Better a shoe buckle at the State Assembly than a swashbuckle on the raging main, say I."

"I hope to make the other fellow do the dancing this time," I replied. "And when I get back I shall claim you for the first quadrille. Good-bye, dear Duchess."

"I fear that would make Mlle. Bloc jealous," she replied. "Well, good-bye, my boy, don't forget to take your overshoes and plenty of handkerchiefs."

A ROYAL GUEST

But beneath her smile there was a suggestion of tears. I wondered, as I kissed her hand, if the girls of this generation would grow into such sweet old gentlewomen.

At midnight I dismissed my chauffeur and walked out to the quay, off which my own three-hundred-foot, ocean-going yacht awaited me with steam up. My own officers and crew had been replaced with substitutes from the Royal Navy. A battery of rapid-fire guns and a store of small arms had been put on board, stowed safely out of sight, for emergencies, though I hoped to have no use for them. But one could not tell what situations might develop before I returned. Captain Lehman and his officers saluted me as I climbed aboard from the tender, the crew were drawn up at quarters, and in a few minutes we were steaming quietly out of the harbor into the great, starlit sea.

The next few days were trying ones indeed to me. We made good speed and the officers and crew were busy in familiarizing themselves with the splendid craft and perfecting the methods of bringing into use its hastily collected armament, but for me, a landlubber, there was little to do, and again and again, as I restlessly paced the decks, the problem of the

THE LOST PRINCESS

packet episode harassed me. Was Made-moiselle de Beaupre, then, an arch impostor, receiving so gently yet so falsely my friendship on that eventful evening in Prince Rafael's palace, and imposing upon my ingenuousness to win back from me by cold premeditated finesse the packet of diplomatic letters? I pictured her again and again riding with me, as she had done, through the leafy forests, or chatting gaily in some cozy nook of the palace, always so vivacious, yet so curiously inscrutable and elusive. How could this gentle woman, guarded, as she had evidently been, from the harsher aspects of the world, have a heart so cold that she could accept the chivalrous trust of a man, knowing that she was accepting it to bring about his own disgrace? How could this piquant little noblewoman look so softly from her cushions in the motor car into my eyes that moonlight night and take from me, to my own undoing, that fatal package and then deliberately flee back with it to Malvers? I realized that I knew little about women, but still, in my heart, I could not reconcile my estimate of her nature with this act of treachery.

The more I thought of her the more mysterious did she become, and I was absolutely at a

A ROYAL GUEST

loss to understand the King's agitation when I mentioned to him her name. That he had once known her was evident; that she was associated with some tragic experience was equally so. Was she of Malvers or Belmania? Why had the King, young, brilliant, loved by all, remained all these years unmarried, and why had he always shown such listless interest in women? I felt that I had stumbled upon some hidden romance, some unusual mystery.

My enforced inactivity on board made me increasingly restless, and it was a great relief when the straits through which Prince Rafael's yacht would have to pass on her way to Pavonia were sighted. I was gratified to find the submarines which had been sent on ahead all posted in advantageous positions. Electrical communication between us and them was at once established and it was evident that each little craft understood his duty. We had arrived none too soon, for at dawn the next morning the telescope revealed the Prince's yacht steaming rapidly and all unconscious of danger toward us. As war had not been actually declared between our two countries, if I should boldly attack him with the view to capturing him and forcibly taking the packet

THE LOST PRINCESS

which he would undoubtedly have on his person, it would naturally bring about the very disaster which I was striving so hard to prevent. So open battle or visible force was out of the question. I had hit upon a rather desperate device, however, which might possibly, but only possibly, succeed. The chance, however, was worth taking.

I picked the yacht up at once with wireless, announced myself as being an amateur yachtsmen from Brazil, and received the reply that Prince Rafael was merely a Malvers gentleman traveling for pleasure. He was evidently preserving strict incognito. Secretly signaling to the submarine nearest to him, as his yacht rapidly approached the straits, I sent him a message to navigate with extreme care, as it was reported that a dangerous derelict loaded with explosives was in the vicinity. Before he had time to slow up I gave another secret signal, and a few moments later a column of water rose suddenly alongside the Prince's bow. From the deck we then witnessed a spectacular and thrilling scene. The great yacht lurched and staggered, masses of white steam rose from her gleaming side, iridescent in the beams of the rising sun. A muffled

A ROYAL GUEST

report floated across the water, seething foam climbed over the stern, and in a few moments the once beautiful craft was wallowing, broken and helpless, in the gentle swell of the summer sea.

Now came our time for action. As I was known to the Prince and his suite it would be impossible for me to appear in the coming events, and Captain Lehman was to enact the part of the Brazilian gentleman and do the honors of the occasion. Setting a flag signal that we were coming to the rescue, we put on full steam and rapidly approached the stricken yacht. By this time the telescope revealed masses of struggling men in the water amid the wreckage, and other frantic but well-drilled knots of men lowering and filling the life-boats. Our own boats were in the water almost as promptly, Captain Lehman and the gig in the midst of the rescue. My first duty was now to signal the submarines instantly to efface themselves from the scene and to return home, their duties being over, and then, as the first boat returned with the rescued men, I myself disappeared from the scene of action.

Captain Lehman acted his part most cleverly. He had Prince Rafael with him in his own gig,

THE LOST PRINCESS

uninjured but somewhat dazed by the suddenness of the catastrophe, and I caught a glimpse of his saturnine face, paler even than usual, as he came over the side. Captain Lehman at once volunteered to change his course and carry his visitor to Valdecosta, the port of Pavonia which was their destination, and the offer was gratefully accepted. Only half a dozen of the crew had been wounded, but the yacht was so completely wrecked that almost before the life-boats got well away from her, her engines exploded, a great cloud of white steam rose in the air and with a gigantic sigh the ship wallowed sickeningly to port and then to starboard, and plunged headlong to the bottom. For an hour or more our own decks were filled with excited men, the officers and sailors of the Prince's yacht, frantic with grief and mortification at what they believed to be a hideous accident which would cast a blemish on their professional career, and the Prince himself was so unnerved that it was several hours before he emerged from my cabin which had been placed at his disposal.

I was feeling greatly elated with the success of this delicate maneuver. It was my plan to allow no suspicions of the true state of

A ROYAL GUEST

affairs to occur to the Prince and his men. He would undoubtedly have the packet upon his person, as the object of the trip was to show it to his cousin King Theocrite in order to enlist his help in the projected war, and Captain Lehman was instructed to mix a sleeping potion with the Prince's evening repast so that when he retired for the night it would be easy to abstract the packet from his clothing and substitute for it another one which, outwardly, would resemble it exactly but with contents which would be entirely innocuous. The next morning we hoped to land him and his men at Valdecosta, receiving with smug satisfaction their gratitude, and then sail away for home.

All the morning we steamed rapidly along. Our visitors were made as comfortable as possible, the weather was fair, and in the little cabin which I had chosen for my temporary retirement I was feeling in excellent spirits.

Imagine my consternation, then, when, after lunch, Captain Lehman burst into my room with dismay written plainly on his face.

"The game is up, Sir!" he cried. "It is no use!"

"What do you mean?" I demanded.

"The Prince has just told me that before the

THE LOST PRINCESS

'accident' to his yacht he had been in wireless communication with the Pavonian Admiralty office at Valdecosta and that they had dispatched a small cruiser to meet him. He had been compelled to reveal that he was the reigning Prince of Malvers, and I was just saying some polite things about being honored to aid so distinguished a personage. The cruiser was sent to act as an escort of honor, though he is traveling incognito and she may come in sight at any hour. That means that he and his men will go aboard of her sometime to-day and not give us the extreme pleasure of entertaining him over night."

"And we, his gallant rescuers," I continued dolefully, "need not continue further out of our course to accommodate them. Damn the luck!"

We tried in vain to hit upon some other expedient, and while we were discussing, an officer from the bridge stepped in and stated that the cruiser was already sighted. For a few moments I paced the tiny cabin with anguish and exasperation. Were those papers, resulting from a fatal blunder on the part of our minister, and which would lash the subjects of Prince Rafael into a fury of anger against us

A ROYAL GUEST

and now literally within my grasp on board my own yacht, to be quietly allowed to go over the side in my enemy's inner pocket, while I flattened my nose against the port-hole window and impotently watched him? Plan after plan raced through my mind, each to be rejected. To use force would be impossible and I had to swallow my wrath and remain passive in that miserable cabin while Captain Lehman, breathing fire and brimstone inwardly, but outwardly of admirable placidity, went out on deck to receive the parting thanks of his protégés and bow them politely down the companionway.

The Pavonian cruiser now lay motionless near us and her officers were informed by signals of the tragic event of the morning. Boats were put into the water from both ships and soon the Malvers men were being expeditiously transferred.

Prince Rafael paused at the top of the companionway and his suspicious eyes swept the decks darkly. But all tokens of the true nature of his surroundings had been carefully removed.

"It seems strange," he muttered, "about that derelict. It was extraordinarily explosive."

THE LOST PRINCESS

He glanced at Captain Lehman who was looking blandly at him. "However, I must thank you again for your warning and your rescue. Your men, — perhaps some little reward?"

"No indeed, I couldn't allow it!" hastily interposed the pseudo Brazilian, bowing him down the ladder. "We were only too glad, I assure you, to render you what assistance we could." And in another moment the last boat load of our visitors was rowing toward the cruiser whose untimely arrival had ruined all my plans.

In silent rage I watched the Prince depart. He must have the packet on his person and the original letters it contained, not mere copies, for the old King Theocrite, his cousin, would naturally insist on seeing the genuine documents where so much was at stake. And now for the second time I had failed, and I had hurt a half dozen men in blowing up the yacht in the attempt to avert a war which would, however, mean the destruction of thousands. I must begin, then, all over again. I renewed my vows to myself with redoubled vehemence. I would myself secure that packet if I had to follow the Prince alone to Valdecosta and

A ROYAL GUEST

pluck them from him, with my own hands, disguised as a highwayman.

Gradually I began to see various possibilities, and I sent for Captain Lehman and we consulted long together. Soon I decided on a line of action and the next morning I was set ashore in a small boat at a fishing hamlet not many miles from Valdecosta. I was dressed as a common sailor, and in the village I purchased a costume such as the peasants wore, and the following day journeyed by a mule cart, the owner of which was going to market to the capital city.

After I had paid my conductor and bidden him good-bye, I made my way quietly to our Consulate and, after some little difficulty, succeeded in seeing the Belmanian Consul, to whom I disclosed my identity.

THE DRYAD OF VILLA CLYTIE

CHAPTER IV

THE DRYAD OF VILLA CLYTIE

INNUMERABLE market wagons and two-wheeled carts gay with colors of the vegetables and flowers, — green-topped carrots and bunches of parsley, symmetrically piled white onions and leeks, balloon shaped yellow cheeses and ruby stacks of berries, — filled the public square, while brightly costumed groups of country people and housewives attending eagerly to their Friday morning marketing made the place a brilliant and animated picture. Around the four sides of the square the houses stood in long, cream-colored rows. Stiff little bay trees cast round blots of black on the pavement, and overhead was the cloudless blue sky. Little wooden booths, with red-striped canvas awnings, stood in rows between the lines of clipped plane trees, and many unharnessed donkeys and shaggy ponies were tethered in the shade beneath them. The

THE LOST PRINCESS

incessant chatter of bargaining and gossip arose, and the bright-garbed people all seemed rosy and prosperous as I threaded my way among them and, leaving the square behind me, passed down a long narrow street that led out of town and to the vineyard-covered hills beyond.

The brilliant sunshine seemed to sparkle in my veins that glorious summer morning, and I set out in high spirits on my long walk to the distant country villa of King Theocrite. Soon I reached the edge of the town. The straight, paved street, with high masonry buildings on each side, became suddenly a country road. High brick or stone walls, tinged with the soft green of mosses, rose on each side from rank weeds and flowering brier and partly hid the orange, lemon, and almond groves beyond them. Through an occasional iron-barred gateway I caught glimpses of cool green vistas formed by long lines of fruit trees in full flower. Gently sloping hills, terraced with walls of field stone and thickly planted with grape-vines, rose to the wooded mountains beyond, and down the valley, between them, I walked for an hour or more till a peasant pointed out to me the park of the royal villa lying ahead on the left. Pres-

THE DRYAD OF VILLA CLYTIE

ently I came to an ornamental iron grill-work gateway in the wall, and a little curly-headed girl swung open the heavy gate and smiled joyously up at me as I patted her cheek. Her father, the gate porter, respectfully took my pass and pointed out the shortest avenue to the sea terrace beyond, on which the villa was situated.

I paused for a moment, struck with the beauty of the scene. Beyond me stretched a great garden of oranges and citrons with long box-bordered paths of classic symmetry under them. At intervals, marble statues stood in white relief against niches of topiary foliage, while giant, feathery plumes of palm trees murmured over their motionless heads. I removed my hat in the cool shade and breathed in ecstasy the perfume of the flowers. Far down the straight path before me the white villa of Theocrite suddenly discovered itself, standing out against the blue sky, and all the world of turmoil and excitement seemed shut out behind the grill-work gates through which I had passed. Romance was in the air and whispered through the leaves to the listening and ancient statues, while the gnarled olive trees were eloquent of centuries past. It was a

THE LOST PRINCESS

garden where Petrarch might, with his Laura, have lived the poems which afterward echoed the passion of his love, where Dante might have paced in midnight reverie, and Virgil, from the terrace, looking far down at the blue at his feet, have conjured his shadowy fleets and lived in an Aeneid of dreams.

I seated myself on a carved marble bench to enjoy a few moment's rest. It had been several days since I had arrived at our consulate and I had been kept informed, through some clever young spies whom I had sent out, of the movements of Prince Rafael. Through a freak of good fortune, one of them, disguised as a game-keeper, had overheard, from the other side of the hedge, a conversation between Prince Rafael and his elderly cousin King Theocrite, which had told him that the King had seen the unfortunate correspondence contained in the packet and was inclined to join in the war, but before doing so had demanded a month's time in which to summon his councilors. His royal visitor, who evidently was secretly angry at the delay, had been compelled to accept it and also to leave the papers with Theocrite, who wished to show them to his councilors, and they were now safely stored away in Theocrite's

THE DRYAD OF VILLA CLYTIE

vault at the villa. A day or two after this the Prince had sailed away home with his men, promising to be back in a month for his cousin's decision. So the character of the campaign had changed somewhat and I would have to do with the gentle and scholarly old Theocrite rather than with his disagreeable young kinsman. I had no definite plan before me save to present myself as a German university student armed with forged letters of introduction from Heidelberg, and I trusted to circumstances to procure, in one way or another, that elusive packet and make good my promise to my King.

Proceeding toward the great marble platform upon which the villa stood, I ascended a few steps, and, from the balustrade before me, the great bay of Valdecosta suddenly spread itself out far below me at the foot of the cliffs in matchless beauty. The balustrade, with gay flowering plants arranged in its great stone urns, bordered the very brink of the precipice, which sank straight and sheer to the little beach far below. To the right, the shore line curved in a majestic arc for many miles, indented here and there with harbors where the yellow walls of the little towns clustered at

THE LOST PRINCESS

the rim of each. At the end of the arc rose the shadowy conical peak of Monte Stefano, partly obscured in the haze of distance, and a few shreds of vapory clouds hung to its summit. To the left, part way down the curve of the shore line, lay the city gleaming in the sunlight. The waters of the bay were in tones of rich green. White sails flecked its surface and cast glimmering reflections which undulated with ripples.

I heard a light footstep behind me and, turning, saw a young woman who was quite as exquisite as the view which had enthralled me. She was of medium height and slender. Her dark hair was parted in the middle and rippled across her brows. It was the unusually beautiful coloring of her face quite as much as its regular features which gave it its charm. She seemed a dryad in her white dress who had wandered from one of the niches in the foliage in the garden, yet a subtle dignity combined with winsomeness made her fascinatingly human. I caught myself from the habitual salute just in time, and bowing said:

"Mademoiselle, if I have intruded, I beg your pardon. I am Count Steinheim of Heidelberg, with letters of introduction to His Majesty."

THE DRYAD OF VILLA CLYTIE

"You will be welcome, I am sure, if you are from Heidelberg," she replied pleasantly. "His Majesty always is delighted to see any one from his old university. Every few years he goes back there, and he will, I am sure, be glad to see you. If you will go the second door in the south wing there, they will take you to his secretary." And inclining her head slightly she passed on down the terrace.

I approached the palace before me with a new zest and was, in due time, ushered into a large pleasant study lined on all sides with books, and with windows on the sea front revealing the matchless view of the bay. At an enormous table strewn with papers, bits of machinery, and scientific drawings, which stood in the center of the apartment, sat a most striking looking man. He was of large stature with a leonine head of soft-spun hair, and beard of fleckless white, and a face pink with health and singularly smooth and free from lines. His eyes were blue and kindly and I felt an instant liking and admiration for him. Was this the eccentric King of Pavonia, kinsman of the despised Rafael and thought by some to be insane? His welcome was a pleasant combination of kingly dignity and a

THE LOST PRINCESS

scholar's simplicity, and I felt a sudden distaste at my imposture, pretending, as I was, to be merely a Heidelberg post-graduate, who had heard of his inventions and who had come to learn more of them. I was indeed a Heidelberg man and it was delightful exchanging reminiscences of old professors and customs with this kindly old gentleman, whom I quickly discovered was more than a King. He was a "personality."

He loved "Villa Clytie" he told me, to which he retired every summer for a "vacation." Once away from his city palace, he discarded, so far as possible, all pomp, and lived the life of a simple country gentleman.

"Bankers and business men must have their vacations and a periodical change from their regular work, why should not a king?" he remarked benignly. "Modern politics and conditions do not allow a ruler to be a mere figure-head and he must be constantly deciding practical questions of the highest importance, and I find a summer vacation quite as necessary as does one of my clerks in the Treasury Department. Then, too, it is the only chance I have to enjoy my harps, of which we shall talk later. And now we shall have luncheon on

THE DRYAD OF VILLA CLYTIE

the terrace and you will come out every day to see us." And, rising, he led the way outside.

A table had been spread under a striped awning on the marble platform near where I had entered it, and when I saw three covers arranged I hoped — yes, there she was, approaching with some fresh flowers she had cut in the garden. The little dryad, with the slender oval face and rippling brown hair waving across her brow, was his orphaned granddaughter, the Princess Clytie, who lived with him and whom he evidently idolized.

So we three sat at luncheon under the awning and I found a new element to cope with and a new delight in my long and difficult quest. There were fowls from the villa farm, fresh vegetables and fruits from the garden, and wine from Sicily, and we luxuriated in the sparkling summer noon and chatted of Germany and Europe and the topics which naturally arise among those who travel and who are familiar with the goings and comings of the great world.

***THE SECRET OF THE
LABORATORIES***



CHAPTER V

THE SECRET OF THE LABORATORIES

IT was only through force of will and a belief that duty demanded it, that I could continue in the false position in which I had placed myself. It was intolerable to receive such kindly welcome at the villa, as I went there each day, feeling myself an impostor and accepting the hospitality for the sole purpose of securing something which they would be unwilling to give. I hated myself in my role of spy, but I felt I should be justified if I could, in the end, succeed in averting the horrors of war. Fortunately I had been a good student while at the University in Heidelberg and I was able to converse with the King upon topics congenial to him, and I was sure that my cordial liking for him was in some slight measure reciprocated.

And each day I saw the Princess Clytie. Sometimes I was permitted to chat with her

THE LOST PRINCESS

as she sat with her embroidery upon the terrace, sometimes to hold the basket when she cut roses in the garden, and often she would curl herself in a great padded chair as the King and I talked together in his library, whose windows overlooked the bay. He was a delightfully cultured and widely read man and his hobby for many years had been physics. Sometimes when he would launch on his favorite theme I would notice a look of uneasiness come to the face of the Princess. Usually she would try to lead him to some other topic, but she did it always very subtly so that her grandfather never noticed it. One day, after I had been going to the palace for about two weeks, he would not be diverted from his favorite theme, and, after several questions on my part about some points he seemed to be, at least to me, a little visionary upon, he regarded me reflectively for a moment and then said:

“You have never seen my laboratories, Count Steinheim. Come! let us look through them and I will explain how I spend my hours of leisure as a relaxation from the cares of State.”

A startled look, almost of fear, flashed into

SECRET OF THE LABORATORIES

the mobile face of the little Princess. She raised her eyebrows as if she were pleading with me to help her. But the King turned to her and took her hand, and she smiled brightly at him and arose to accompany us. There was nothing else for me to do but to follow, though I realized that the Princess was going against her will. We passed down the marble terrace to a semi-detached wing, one story in height and with screened windows. On each side of the doorway was a marble seat shaded by a graceful Ionic portico. His Majesty paused with key in his hand before the door, and, seating himself on one of the benches, he drew his granddaughter down beside him and motioned me to the other.

"Before we go in," he said, "let me give you a little lecture on physics, so that you will understand the discovery I have made. When I first elaborated the process of putting to certain uses the principles of vibrations, I felt that I had discovered, perhaps, the chief secret of life, but now, although my invention is a success, I realize that we are all puny atoms in the great scheme of life, struggling blindly toward some end unknown to us and held in the hollow of the hand of the great Physicist in which it is

THE LOST PRINCESS

useless to struggle," and the speaker's fair, rosy face grew even pinker as he looked with wistful eyes out across the bay before us.

"As you know quite well, Count Steinheim, modern science shows that we have many more than the proverbial five senses. The sense of heat, of cold, of equilibrium, and the muscular sense are all separate ones. The sense of equilibrium, for instance, is located in the small canals in the ear. Others are constantly being discovered, the alimentary sense, for example, which is the sense of hunger and thirst, is now regarded as a distinct one, yet these are not of course new ones, they have merely been recently classified. We used to think that the eye was given us to show the world about us, yet it conceals far more than it reveals, allowing us a few inefficient glimpses of grosser external things. Evolution teaches us that growth is a gradual change from lesser to greater complexity, from imperfection toward perfection, from chaos to cosmos. The initiative which is innate in every particle of the universe strives to overcome these deficiencies. People, for instance, who live in tropical climates, who have nearly all the necessities of life ready made to their use, do not progress as much

SECRET OF THE LABORATORIES

as people who live in sterner climates who have to struggle for their very existence. This habit of struggle carries them into constantly higher planes of civilization. The man who swims against the tide develops stronger muscular material than him who floats idly with the current. And science, which is a constant struggle toward wisdom, has already given us the X-ray, which can pierce matter as the unaided eye cannot do. The one thing which these mysterious rays cannot penetrate is a lens, and as the human eye is merely a lens the countless unseen and unfelt wave motions throbbing about on all sides are persistently shut out from our brains by the very organs which are supposed to enable us to see the world. In other words, an infinite number of vibrations are beating upon us on all sides and to which we are insensible.

“My discovery helps slightly that very imperfect creation, man, on its long journey toward perfection. With the sense of feeling, one is conscious of several hundred vibrations a second — the flutter of an insect’s wing, for instance. If they are faster than that they seem to us to be constant pressure. Sounds are caused by vibrations which pass through

THE LOST PRINCESS

the air into the drum membrane in the ear, thence along a complex arrangement of bones and nerves to the brain. When a stretched cord vibrates twelve or fifteen times a second sound is first audible. This is the note G, three octaves below the staff. The faster the vibrations, the higher is the note, till fifty thousand a second is reached, which is the note G six octaves above the staff. This is the extreme limit of human hearing, though of course the same sound vibration may exist far above and far below that scale. Vibrations from fifty thousand a second to four hundred and thirty-five billions a second are absolutely unheeded by the human brain. At four hundred and thirty-five billions per second color becomes visible. As the vibrations still increase all the colors of the spectrum are produced from red to violet, and at seven hundred and seventy billions of vibrations a second color ceases so far as our human perceptions are concerned. Notice the great 'gaps' where we perceive nothing. The human senses are, then, so few that we are absolutely unaware of far more vibrations than we are aware of. Billions of them are wasted upon us. If there are finer orders of being such as angels, they are prob-

SECRET OF THE LABORATORIES

ably sensitive to many more of these vibrations than we are. And God is conscious of them all."

The King leaned forward and looked eagerly into my face and I was slightly startled at the expression in his eyes. Princess Clytie was clapping her hands nervously and looking apprehensively at him.

"The reeds in the river bed," Theocrite chanted dreamily, "vibrate with the wind and sing the song of their personality, the red rose betokens hers, the yellow rose hers in their vibrations of color,—music transposed into terms of silence. All life is music, sweet to those who can listen, but the most wonderful creation in the world, this ever changing human soul of ours, has yet found no true interpreter of its personality."

The speaker rose suddenly and put his key in the lock of the door.

"I have learned," he said, "to hear this human music, to scientifically record the vibration of personality and I have supplied another sense — have filled one of the gaps with my instruments inside, my harps, as I call them. Before them the soul is unveiled and shows itself good or evil, music or discord."

THE LOST PRINCESS

He led the way into the laboratory, and as the Princess followed him she whispered to me:

"Poor, dear grandfather, please help me bring him back as soon as possible."

I reassured her with a glance and stepped into the apartment after them.

"Was ever a man on so strange a quest before?" I said to myself inwardly, amused as well as mystified by the situation. "Here am I, a soldier, doing secret service duty, plunged into a maze of pseudo scientific mysteries and talking physics with a mad philosopher in trying to avert a very unphilosophic war." My host drew aside the window curtains and I saw a number of large instruments constructed partly of a complexity of delicate steel springs, brass cogwheels, rows of harp chords, sounding boards, megaphone funnels and cylinders; oak cases with glass doors revealed many rows of what appeared to be photograph films rolled on cylinders, and the acoustic properties of the room were so delicately planned that every sound was unusually audible. The King wandered aimlessly among them for a few moments.

"The instruments are of two classes," he said, "those which receive the vibrations of personality and in which the records are made,

SECRET OF THE LABORATORIES

and those which transpose them into terms of sound and reproduce them in music. A photograph plate receives light impressions, mine receive impressions of sound. The records, as you see, are kept in an air-tight case just as the sensitive plate of the camera is protected from light. Mine are extremely sensitive for the waves of personality are much subtler than light waves. I have searched the world for the materials of which they are constructed. My first experiments were partial failures because I could only catch the passing mood of the subject, but now I have learned to reach his true character."

"I have made many tests," he continued, "with these æolian harps, which are played upon, not by mere air currents but by far subtler, spiritual ones. In these cases," he said, tapping on a glass door of one of the cabinets, "I know who are my friends and who are my enemies, whom to trust and whom to be wary of"; then he turned and, smiling, tapped me lightly on the shoulder, "and tomorrow, Count Steinheim, I shall know you as you are, for I have just made a record of you," and we went out into the bright sunlight of the terrace again.

THE LOST PRINCESS

I must admit I was somewhat disquieted; not that I believed for a moment in his preposterous apparatus, but I was feeling decidedly uncomfortable in my present role and perhaps by some coincidence he might hit upon something which would cause him to distrust me. However, the world outside looked very real and matter-of-fact and the disquietude rapidly passed away. Guests had arrived and were waiting in the palace to be presented to the King, a genial old near-sighted professor from Stuttgart, a musician from Vienna, with his bourgeoisie wife and a privy counselor of the realm, and through the King's courtesy I sat with the strangely assorted little company at luncheon, which was, as usual, served under an awning on the terrace. Afterward a beautiful Italian guitar was brought out from the music room and the Princess played and sang charmingly for us. And a little later I walked slowly homeward down the valley to my apartments in town.

*SUNSHINE AND MOONLIGHT IN
ARCADY*

CHAPTER VI

SUNSHINE AND MOONLIGHT IN ARCADY

THE next morning the Princess Clytie and I had a half-hour together under the lemon trees in the ancient garden. We sat on a semi-circular marble seat and the air was fragrant with flowers. After a pause in the conversation, she cast a swift, arch look at me and said:

"My grandfather is very wise in some ways, but in one he is very ignorant."

"He is a human being," I replied, "so that would not be surprising."

"He has spent years of study to perfect a means of knowing something that I know without any study."

"You mean," I said, "that your intuition as a woman tells you what he imagines his harps tell him — the manner of a man?"

She laughed lightly.

"He told me this morning that he had developed your record and that you were a

THE LOST PRINCESS

man who rang true. I knew that already. I am sure you are glad to know that you have his confidence."

"Indeed I am!" I exclaimed fervently.

"And yet," she continued, "I think I know something which his records failed to show him."

"What is that!" I asked, startled.

She glanced at me furtively and scratched with the tip of her lace parasol in the gravel. "There is something about you I do not understand. I do not mean that you do not ring true, but —" then she faced me, half timidly, yet with a certain shy boldness, "Why are you here?"

I looked at her blankly. Before those eyes I had nothing to say.

"You are no mere Heidelberg student come here to talk science with my grandfather! There is something deeper in your errand. You are a soldier — ah! do not deny it! There are touches of it in your manner frequently. There is some great game being played and you are playing it splendidly. But what good would those harps be, even if they were real as dear grandfather imagines them to be, when they cannot reveal — well, what a woman knows without knowing why? Have your great plans

MOONLIGHT IN ARCADY

taken woman's intuition into account?" and she eyed me with laughing mockery only lightly veiled in her eyes.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "I am trying to play a game, a great game, with affairs of state at stake. I matured my plans, however, as only a mere man can. I did not take feminine instinct into account. I surrender."

She looked at me eagerly.

"I feel as if a fascinating book of romance and adventure were held temptingly before me, but I am not allowed to read it. Are you the hero or the villain, sir!"

I pondered forlornly.

"I almost wish I were either," I said. "At times I fancied I played a role of some small importance in it, but I am beginning to feel that my role is only that of the buffoon whose antics are of no real consequences."

"That is nice," she said demurely, "I believe it is the proper thing for the woman to humble the haughty hero."

"I am not the hero," I said, "but where did you learn so much?"

"I have not spent all my time in the gardens of Villa Clytie. I have been in Vienna, in Berlin and in Paris."

THE LOST PRINCESS

Somehow I had never thought of her as ever being anywhere but in this little paradise, a sylvan goddess, shining out white against the shadowy foliage of the garden, and I realized afresh that I was, as she said, "a mere man."

Then the genial Stuttgart professor came along the path and our tête-à-tête was over. During the next few days there were excursions to various picturesque villages, and trips on the harbor on the King's schooner yacht. I did not, of course, go to Villa Clytie every day, and all the time the packet lay securely in some safe hiding-place in the villa and the date of Prince Rafael's return grew remorselessly nearer.

Then one morning as I was walking out from the town, down the valley road toward the villa, a succession of carriages passed me with distinguished looking men in them, and I realized, with a pang, that the council which was to examine the correspondence in the packet, and to pass upon the fateful question as to whether there should or should not be war, was about to meet. There was nothing to do but to turn back and I never spent a longer or more distressingly trying day in my life. The day following I resolved to go to the palace

MOONLIGHT IN ARCADY

and see if I could learn the news. The rosy-cheeked little girl opened the gate to me and was happy with the doll which I brought her, picked up in one of the little shops in town, and, by good luck I met Princess Clytie in her flower garden, alone. We sought the shelter of an arbor hung with grape-vines and she told me some little of what had transpired. Prince Rafael's arguments were cleverly alluring, the packet gave sufficient reason and the decision was — war. That is, the King was clothed with sufficient authority to arrange an offensive alliance with Prince Rafael if he deemed it wise to do so, after another interview with him. All this the little Princess confided to me with seeming artlessness, yet I felt all the time she was studying me intensely and had some motive of her own for being so frank.

“Is this what you came here to find out?” she asked me finally.

“Why should you have told me all this?” I asked wonderingly.

She looked at me for a moment, then bent over her flowers. I felt my face grow hot and my heart jump. I thought, when I first saw this beautiful park, that I had had a glimpse of paradise. I now knew I had never conceived

THE LOST PRINCESS

what paradise could be. I knew it now, — a paradise infinitely more wonderful than anything I had ever imagined. And it lay only partially revealed, glimmering in the depths of a maiden's eyes. The long sought packet, my mission to Pavonia, the plots of Prince Rafael, even my own King, seemed of no consequence, they were vague and far removed from me.

"Dear Princess Clytie," I whispered, "a few days ago you told me you knew I was a sham, and yet you seemed to believe in me. Something told you that the sham was not an evil one. It is not. I am here on a secret mission, but you have stripped me of my defense. I am playing a game, a big game, a man's game. And there are men, good men, who trust in me and rely on me to help them. I am doing my work as well as I can. But since I have known you, I find it is only a game after all and not life. I cannot forget nor neglect my work, but oh! it is so unimportant to me now."

I leaned forward and my hand possessed hers. "May I tell you, dear? May I tell you? You, only, are important, my love, my love! Sweetheart, listen! All the world is forgotten

MOONLIGHT IN ARCADY

when I see you, for I love you, dear, as a man who is trying to do his duty should love a woman. I cannot think of rank. You are royal and I am not. But I do not care. I should not presume to speak to you this way, but I do not care for rank nor station, nor anything that would keep me from loving you. Clytie! my princess! You *must* understand! The war? let it come if it must. My duty? I cannot fail in it because I know it is good that I should love you, and I know now that somehow I shall win the fight and that I can come back in honor and success and claim you. Sweetheart, do you not believe it too?"

She dropped unresisting against me. My arm went around her. She raised her face to mine and the great world of everything else faded away. Only the little vine-clad arbor, only she and I were real.

How do I know what happened after that? The day must have passed, but I scarcely remember it. The villa and the terrace and men and women were presumably a part of it, but I only saw a certain white-clad figure and I only heard a certain sweet voice and even those seemed to be in a dream. And several

THE LOST PRINCESS

days like them passed and I have no remembrance of their details.

Another week went by and Prince Rafael was expected in a few days. The King was more than ever cordial to me. His guests were gone and he and his granddaughter were alone again. I was at the villa every day and we read aloud together on the terrace, and sometimes the Princess played to us and sang in the music room, and I spent many hours in the King's study. Never had I been as happy. The days were a dream of leisure and contentment, and in my active life I had had few enough of them. The languor of the south stole into my veins and I lived in Arcady.

One evening the Princess and I had one of our rare tête-à-têtes together. Moonlight lay yellow upon the marble floor and the urns on the balustrade threw long, black shadows upon it. She had never asked me about my mission or my life, and her sublime confidence in me was the sweetest and most precious token of her love. We spoke of the expected arrival of her cousin Rafael, whom she regarded with an instinctive fear and dislike. The languor of the south had not robbed me of the purpose of my visit and I determined to do

MOONLIGHT IN ARCADY

the hardest thing I had ever attempted. The depth of my love for her was the measure of the repulsiveness of what I contemplated doing. In saying what I had I could not use an endearing term to her.

She saw my distress and helped me like the brave little woman that she was.

"Tell me what it is, Karl," she asked simply.

"Princess," I said at last, and my voice seemed strange to me. Somehow it did not seem fit that I should make any explanations. "Somewhere in the villa is the Packet of Diplomatic Correspondence that Prince Rafael brought here. It is necessary that I should have it. It is why I came here to Pavonia — to obtain that packet. It is right that I should have it. Can you obtain it for me?"

She regarded me quietly, yet with indescribable sweetness.

"Are you sure that it is right for you to have it?" she asked.

"I am sure," I answered.

She arose.

"Wait here and I will bring it to you," was all she said. Then she left me sitting there alone, in the niche in the balustrade, and went toward the villa. Behind me and far down

THE LOST PRINCESS

the cliff the ripples of the harbor water tapped against the pebbly beach. A few fishermen's boats were moored at their piers, and far down the shore the lights in the peasants' cottage windows twinkled here and there in the dark foliage. In front of me the ancient statues in the garden were dimly discerned, and at the other end of the terrace the great marble villa gleamed.

While she was gone I paced the moonlit terrace in repressed excitement. Was it possible that at last I was to have the precious packet in my possession and be free to slip away from Pavonia and return in triumph with it to my King? Then came the sudden thought that this would mean a farewell to Villa Clytie where I had spent the happiest hours of my life. Should I ever see it again? And I pictured in anguish the gentle old King when he learned that the man to whom he had given his trust and his hospitality had played him false. Still it was all part of the game I said half bitterly to myself. Then I saw the white figure of Princess Clytie shimmering in the moonlight, coming noiselessly toward me.

We sat down together in the little niche in the balustrade wall and she placed the packet on my knee.

MOONLIGHT IN ARCADY

"Here it is," she said quietly.

A rush of feeling swept over me. It was more than human nature could stand, my human nature at least. I could not sink to this subterfuge of securing the packet. Had I loved and honored her less it might have been possible. But I could not make a tool of her.

"Dear little Princess," I whispered tenderly, realizing now to the full how I loved her. "How do you know that you should give this to me? It is, as you know, an important state document. Giving it thus to me might bring about far-reaching results of which you are entirely in ignorance. Why do you do it?" And my fingers trembled slightly as they held the long, bulky envelope.

"I do not know why I should," she answered. "I only know that you asked me to give it to you and you would not take it unless it were right for you to have it. I know nothing about the consequences. I give it to you because I believe you know it is best so." And her eyes looked serenely and trustingly into mine.

I took her hand and held it.

"Sweetheart," I said, "this packet is more

THE LOST PRINCESS

precious to me than my life." For a moment I was silent, too much moved to continue. When I spoke again, my voice did not seem to be my own. "Yet now that I have it, I cannot keep it. There is something of far more value to me than life always, and more so now than ever — honor. Until this moment I never doubted that I could secure these letters under any circumstances, with honor. Now I know it is not so. Perhaps, if I do not take it, a very dreadful thing will happen. I cannot tell. Only I know, when I look at you, that now I cannot, with honor, take it."

Her hand lay unresistingly in mine and her eyes met mine in full trust and serenely. Our souls seemed to come very close together as we sat thus in the shadowy niche in the balustrade. Moments passed, I do not know how many. At last I spoke:

"Dear Princess, I shall never forget your trust in me. But please go now and put those papers back where you found them. I must work things out some other way. There must be some other way and I shall find it." And I raised her hand to my lips and held it there for a brief while. Then she rose and, smiling, bade me good night and turned and walked

MOONLIGHT IN ARCADY

slowly down the terrace to the villa. And that was the last time I should see her for many a long day.

And so, for the third time, I failed to secure the packet.

THE LOST PRINCESS

CHAPTER VII

THE LOST PRINCESS

ALL that night I walked back and forth upon the deserted country road between the villa park and the city, going over in my mind every detail of the last few weeks and analyzing my decision to return the documents when I had them safe in my possession. Had I been false to my King and my country, and created, through sentiment, a false standard of honor? Yet no thought of regret at what I had done disturbed me. And so I went on to the problem of what should be done next. On the morrow Prince Rafael was expected and the King was to give him a favorable answer. I knew that he had decided to join in the war with the greatest regret. He dreaded the undertaking intensely, but Prince Rafael had evidently been writing him seductively and Theocrite's ministers, fired with the thoughts of the gain to come from the war and the in-

THE LOST PRINCESS

creased prestige to their country, favored it. I sought for some suggestion to make to the King for a little delay, and at last, just as dawn crept over the hills, a forlorn hope, a desperate idea came to me, and I returned to the modest rooms I had rented in town, and, utterly worn out, flung myself into bed for a few brief hours.

By mid morning I was driving in a hired fiacre once more over the familiar road and, arriving at the villa, induced the secretary to arrange an immediate audience with the King, and presently I was sitting in the great study.

"Your Majesty," I said, "during the month I have been in Pavonia you have received me with extraordinary kindness and honored me to some extent with your confidence. I feel that I have the honor of your friendship and I prize that more than you know. You have told me that Prince Rafael is expected to-day and that you are to arrange with him to join in a great enterprise. It chances that I know more of this than you are aware and I am going to ask you to allow me to speak to you as man to man, and I give you my word of honor that I believe I am doing right in saying what I have come here this morning to say." Seeing

THE LOST PRINCESS

his interested and friendly look I had courage to continue.

"The Prince is your kinsman, but I believe you know him personally only slightly. Are you sure as to his character, no matter how just his cause may appear to you? I have powerful friends in Europe, through whom I have seen things from another point of view, and I believe you would do well to hesitate. I suggest that you delay this momentous decision a little longer. At least study your cousin's character. Put him to the test of your harps and see if he rings true."

Here I took a long chance and continued. "If he does, it will have done no harm; if he does not, you will, I am sure, give further consideration to the matter before you join with him. Believe me, your Majesty, I have good reason for what I say."

At the mention of the harps the King's expression changed slightly. He paused for a moment before replying and then said:

"Something tells me your advice is good and I thank you for it." Then I knew that the interview was over, and with an unutterable sense of relief I took my leave and returned to town, to spend the rest of the day in restless-

THE LOST PRINCESS

ness and anxiety as to the developments of the next few hours.

Early that afternoon the Prince's yacht arrived a little ahead of time, and as he came incognito he was driven alone to the villa in one of the royal carriages. Events indeed transpired rapidly and far more portentously than I could have dreamed. The next morning I was aroused from sleep by an authoritative knocking at my door and a messenger in the quiet livery of the royal villa servants delivered a note from the King's secretary asking my immediate presence at the villa. More startled than I dared to show, I sent word that I would come as soon as possible and, after making a hasty toilet, descended to the street, very uncertain as to what to do. Had my true status been discovered? And even if not, how could I meet Prince Rafael, who would instantly recognize me? I was slightly reassured by the news that the Prince's yacht had sailed away that morning and that His Highness was on board. So I decided to obey Theocrite's summons, though it was in no pleasant state of mind in which I arrived at the villa.

I was shocked to notice the change in the King's appearance. His face was haggard

THE LOST PRINCESS

and old and an unfamiliar fury lurked in his eyes. He was pacing the terrace and an unwonted air of excitement pervaded the place.

"The damned scoundrel!" he blurted out when he saw me. "The monster! He has carried her off! Clytie, my granddaughter — last night! and has left this." And he literally flung a crumpled note at me.

Dazed, I straightened it out hastily. It was a sheet of the King's library note paper, and on it was written:

"11 P.M. Thursday.

"When you have come to your senses and have decided to join with me, you can have back your granddaughter. Meanwhile she is safe, so you need not hurry.

"RAFAEL, P. R."

"Carried her off! What do you mean, your Majesty? The fiend! I'll hunt him down and kill him! He has carried off my Princess!" I ended up incoherently, and sank to a chair.

At the words "My Princess," Theocrite turned and gazed at me in speechless surprise. But I did not care, nothing was of any consequence now except to find her. The King regarded me long and earnestly.

THE LOST PRINCESS

"Come," he said and his voice trembled, "we must work together. We are two men with a common grief."

All restrictions of rank fell from between us. We were suddenly united in a common and appalling catastrophe. Then he poured out the story.

"We only discovered it this morning when they went to the Princess's room to call her. Out here we live in the greatest simplicity and the Princess dismissed her maid and wanted to walk alone on the terrace before retiring. Rafael must have waylaid her and carried her himself down the winding stairway there, to the foot of the cliff, and a small boat took them off to his yacht. One of my men saw him signaling the ship in the afternoon. He was enraged at me for refusing to join him in his wretched, evil war at present. I had put him to the test of the harps and he rang false, damnably false. Strange I had not thought of testing him when he first came! He has an ungovernable temper, — that I had always known. He jeered at my instruments, called me a madman! Then I told him to return home and not come to me for aid again. I lost my temper for the first time in years. But

THE LOST PRINCESS

he sneered at my harps! He must have discovered Princess Clytie on the terrace and sprang on her and carried her off. No one knew he had gone till this morning. I supposed him asleep in his apartments in the East wing. I have no ships as fast as his yacht and it would be impossible to overtake him." And he paused with a groan.

I listened to him half stunned with horror. The thought that he had been barbarian enough to run off with the exquisite little Princess so filled my brain that the realization that the great, present object of my life, the prevention of the war — had been attained, only occurred to me later and seemed trivial in comparison with what lay so close to my heart. For some minutes we discussed and rejected various plans of action. Pursuit by ships were futile. To mobilize and send an army over seas were equally so. To call upon one of the great powers such as Russia or Austria would give them too good an opportunity to gobble us all up, for our small principalities had long been morsels most tempting to their appetite for territory. My own King could hardly spring into the breach and no diplomatic overtures between him and Prince Rafael were

THE LOST PRINCESS

possible since diplomatic relations between the two principalities were already practically sundered. Prince Rafael had evidently acted rashly in a moment of insane passion, but having acted, he was not the man to back down.

In his emergency the King felt that no counselors could aid him and he turned to me as a friend to help him reach some plan of action. He became rapidly calmer, for he knew that no harm would actually be permitted to come to the Princess. The one point was to rescue her.

I decided to retreat from my false position and to trust to the extraordinary situation to make him understand that, though I had been, while posing as a Heidelberg student, an impostor, I was an honorable man, a nobleman of Belmania and a trusted officer in the service of my King who was endeavoring to avert an unjust war.

"The diplomatic letters," I said, "were an unfortunate and lamentable blunder on the part of our Minister and were absolutely unauthorized by King Ernest. The Minister has placed our country in a false light. With the letters in the possession of the crafty Prince Rafael, who yearned for conquest, he could lash

THE LOST PRINCESS

his subjects into a fury of anger against us and induce them to join him in a war. I was sent to Malvers to secure them under any conditions and thus prevent the horrors of war between us. I succeeded, only to have them retaken by an act of treachery. Knowing the Prince was to bring them to show you, I came here with the hope of again securing them. I have outraged your hospitality by pretending to be, while your trusted guest, what I was not. But I have learned to love you — to love you both,” I added gently, “and now that war is no longer probable, if you can forgive me and not dismiss me in disgrace, I will serve you, for her sake, with the same loyalty with which I have served my King. If your Ministers cannot help you just now, perhaps I can. Will you let me try?”

For a moment or two he regarded me fixedly and I felt that my fate hung in the balance. Then he spoke.

“I forgive you. You are a man — a man of honor. I am sure of it. I am an old widower — alone in the world save for my Clytie. Bring her back to me — bring her back to me!”

He buried his face in his hands and for many moments we were silent. We were

THE LOST PRINCESS

linked together in the strong bonds of mutual sympathy, and the larger world of politics and intrigue seemed far away.

After awhile it suddenly occurred to me that now at least I might have the packet, for it would be of no use to King Theocrite, and then suddenly I realized that in a totally unexpected way, my mission to Pavonia was accomplished. I could take the packet back to King Ernest and tell him that there would be no coalition between Malvers and Pavonia, that there was now small chance of war with this sudden enmity in existence between Prince Rafael and King Theocrite, and that, with these papers in our possession once more, our neighbor could hardly expect to bring his ministers to consent to war.

"Your Majesty," I said, "as you know, it is my King's greatest wish to have once more in his possession the unfortunate series of letters contained in the packet which Prince Rafael left with you. Now that he has outraged your hospitality and placed himself beyond the pale of your consideration, could you not, in justice, give to me the packet for me to carry to my King?"

"The packet!" exclaimed Theocrite. "I returned them to my cousin last evening when we quarreled. He has taken them away with him."

*IN THE TERRACED GARDENS OF
ISOLA PICCOLA*

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE TERRACED GARDENS OF ISOLA PICCOLA

JUST as the sun was dropping into the sea and the reflection of the brown-stained sail and the mast of the little open fishing boat cast long, distorted reflections on its oily surface, the blue outlines of a tiny island rose in symmetrical terraces a few miles in front, and the gentle evening breeze impelled the craft slowly over the sleeping waters. Gradually the details of the island took shape and here and there were seen the red-tiled roofs of cottages clustering close to the water, and above them, gleaming against the green foliage, were glimpses of white balustrades and marble statuary. Slender cypress trees in symmetrical groups thrust themselves upwards against the rosy evening sky and, as the sailboat approached, the outlines of an ornate, cream-colored stucco château, with terra-cotta roof, was discerned, partly concealed in the foliage. I had the tiller,

THE LOST PRINCESS

and five or six peasants, dressed as simple fishermen, were lounging forward, smoking and chatting together in whispers. They came from my seaside estate, were sons of peasant fishermen and excellent sailors all of them, as well as being loyally devoted to me.

King Theocrite had sent me in his yacht down the coast, where I found one of my submarines concealed and waiting for me, and a few days later I had arrived at my town apartments in Belopolis. The following morning I rode down the boulevard upon my charger and through the park to the Palace, and was received in private audience with the King.

I told him in detail of how I had waylaid Prince Rafael's yacht and captured him without his suspecting it, only to see him and his crew go peacefully over the ship's side a little later into the gig from the Pavonia cruiser which had been sent to meet him by his royal uncle; how I had proceeded to villa Clytie, the discovery of Theocrite's hobby and his eccentric scientific studies, and how I had made use of this peculiarity of mind to turn him against his false-hearted nephew. I could not refrain from telling him a little — a very little — of Princess Clytie, and how at last, though I had

GARDENS OF ISOLA PICCOLA

been forced to come home without the packet, I had at least made the alliance between Malvers and Pavonia impossible, and had thus, for the present, averted the war.

King Ernest listened to me with the deepest attention and without speaking a word till I had finished. He sat at his great mahogany desk, pulling at his long dark mustache, and when I finished he exclaimed:

"Why, Baron Casamare, I think you are to be congratulated! You have been of distinct service to the state and to our person. Prince Rafael will certainly hesitate about waging war against us unaided, and while you have not brought back the packet of letters, you have robbed them of a large part of their danger. Your military rank is henceforth that of Colonel and I will request the War Minister to appoint you to the command of the First Household Guards, a place made vacant by the death last week of Colonel Hartz."

Colonel of the Household Guards! One of the most coveted offices in the army! I could hardly find words to express my delight and surprise, and suddenly I longed to tell of this new honor to Princess Clytie.

"You were characteristically fertile in ex-

THE LOST PRINCESS

pedient," King Ernest continued, "and adapted your actions admirably to circumstances. I agree with you, however, that we cannot feel safe until the papers are in our possession. You were, perhaps, less the diplomat, whose creed seems to be that the end in all cases justifies the means, when you returned voluntarily the packet to this charming little Princess, than you were the man. I suppose if I had less sentiment I would say that woman seems to be your undoing, since twice you have had the packet in your possession and have lost it through the blandishments of the other sex," and he regarded me with quizzical sternness for a moment, while I felt decidedly uncomfortable.

"But somehow," he added kindly, "I think I should have done exactly the same thing in your position," and that quiet, magnetic smile of his softened his face for a moment and I recalled, with a feeling of quick sympathy, the presentiment forced upon me that there had been certain sad and romantic episodes in his life which perhaps explained this quick understanding of what I did.

"And now," he continued, "the situation is as follows: Our cousin in royal parlance, Prince

GARDENS OF ISOLA PICCOLA

Rafael, having so outrageously carried off Princess Clytie, the only descendant of his ally, and, by this act, having made King Theocrite his implacable enemy, is probably regretting at leisure this medieval and foolish act of revenge, and realizes that if he wishes to make war with us he must do it unaided. The only visible reason for which, and which might stir his subjects to anger against us, are still where he can work mischief with them."

"Quite true, your Majesty," I cried eagerly, "but he will not declare war at once, and if we rescue the Princess Clytie and return her to her grandfather, who is crushed at her loss, we will at least have his friendship in case war should arise. And beside," I continued impetuously, "I must find her."

The King smiled.

"Here speaks the lover as well as the patriot," he said, "but as the lover you appeal to me strongest. I see that your King no longer reigns supreme in your heart."

"Your Majesty," I exclaimed, "you know that you are always first."

"I know, I know," he said, "first but no longer alone there. But I am not sorry," and he held out his hand to me. "I am not jealous

THE LOST PRINCESS

of your dear little Princess, and I almost envy you this new adventure."

"I wish your Majesty could come, too," I said, impulsively.

"What wouldn't I give," he said softly, "to be free to live my own life as you are doing! I too once loved a maiden. But happiness was not for me, as I am sure it will be for you. I suspect that you once came very near happening upon my secret. Perhaps some day you will. In the meantime my place is here in solitude," and he looked wistfully about the room, "and yours out there in the world — in it and a part of it. Go, find your Princess, and in good time bring her back to me for my blessing," and thus the interview came to an end.

During the next few days spies were busy while I seemingly loitered about the city. My commission was made out at once and my brother officers in my new regiment gave me a dinner at the Military Club.

Of course I repaired as speedily as possible to pay my devoirs to the Duchess in her mansion on the Fauburg, and she welcomed me joyously.

"And did you take your overshoes as I told you to?" she asked.

GARDENS OF ISOLA PICCOLA

"I am afraid I did not," I confessed laughing, "and as it happened, it was the other fellow who needed them. He got into the water."

"I have heard that Prince Rafael suffered a disaster with his yacht," she said. "I wonder if by any possibility you have heard of it."

"I wonder!" I said significantly.

"And when will you ever be able to reveal all those mysteries? It is cruel of you to be so secretive."

"Dear Duchess," I assured her, "I hope, some day, to relate to you a very interesting story, but not at present."

She looked at me keenly.

"I have my suspicions that it may turn out a romance," she said.

"One never can tell," I said.

One day while at my office in the barracks, Antonio and Pedro, who had been in Malvers while I was there and who had been of such assistance to me on the night of my escape, were brought in to me.

"We have found her, my lord," said Pedro, simply, fumbling with his hat.

I sprang up and wrung their hands impulsively.

THE LOST PRINCESS

"Where is she?" I cried.

"We made friends with one of the sailors of Prince Rafael's yacht," he said. "We gave him plenty of wine one night and he told us that he had also been on the ship that brought him home from Valdecosta this last time. The cruiser did not come by the most direct route, but stopped for a few hours at the Isola Piccola where a distant relative of his lives, a very old lady, who lives alone with her servants in the great château. She is unwedded and the last of her race. It is with her that the granddaughter of the King of Pavonia is lodged."

The Prince, then, did not dare to bring the Princess back to his own country! Isola Piccola! a tiny islet far out in the Mediterranean, hardly known to exist! Now for work! I rewarded my two faithful peasant friends and made them happy, and as soon as possible I had taken my leave of the city and speeded, in my motor car, with indescribable eagerness, to Casamare Towers, my ancestral home, where my only near relative, an elder sister, lived.

And so, this quiet summer evening, I was steering a little, open, fishermen's boat, myself in their garb, with no more definite purpose

GARDENS OF ISOLA PICCOLA

than to chance upon some mode of rescue, toward the isle, raising its terraced gardens, alone and lovely, a speck of green in the blue waste of the sea.

Soon we floated into a harbor with a tiny village at the inner rim, and there, in the guise of a pedler of laces, I made friends with the peasants who came sociably down to meet us, and arranged to board at one of the cottages while I should try to sell my wares to the grand ladies up at the palace. My men were to live aboard the boat. That evening, as the moon rose, I wandered along the beach, crept through a thicket, and climbed a wall into the gardens of the palace. They were built upon a symmetrical hill in a series of terraces, each supported by a stone wall, and the upper part of the hill had been artificially leveled and arranged as a formal garden. Around its four sides was a colonnade and through its center ran a water basin, in which the water, gleaming in the soft light of the young moon, was dotted with lilies. In the distance the lights of the palace revealed its dark form, ornamented with many statues. As I stood, concealed in a clump of foliage, a figure in white appeared, walking slowly along the gravel path toward

THE LOST PRINCESS

me. Suddenly my heart jumped, for I saw that it was the Princess. A light mantle was thrown over her head and she was alone. She came close to me and sat down on a marble seat, supported by stone griffins, threw one, partly bare, pink arm along the top of the back, and nestled her head in it, partly concealing her face. I longed to take her suddenly in my arms, but feared to startle her.

"Princess Clytie," I said softly, "I have come," and I stepped out from the foliage.

She half sprang up, and looked at me with shining eyes:

"Karl!" she whispered in wonderment and with infinite sweetness. I knelt before her and she leaned forward to my embrace.

"You wonderful man!" she half sobbed, "How did you do it? But I knew you would." Then she laughed happily. "I am no longer excluded from the story-book. I am part of it now. I have jumped right into the middle of it! What chapter is it we are in now?"

"Are you safe and well?" I demanded; then, "I am afraid we are a long way from the end. And we cannot skip any pages either. We cannot even turn to the last chapter to see how it is going to end."

GARDENS OF ISOLA PICCOLA

"That's the best part of it," she said, "we must work it out ourselves. I hope the book won't be dull!"

"No fear of that for the present," I said, "we'll have all the sword play we want. It will be a story of adventure for awhile."

"And of love," she whispered, and we were silent, happy to be again together.

"Tell me all about it, Mr. Hero," she commanded after a space.

"Tell me first," I replied, "how long you can stay here alone, and about your voyage."

"Oh, I come here every evening for an hour or two. The old Countess plays piquet with the fat housekeeper and then dozes in the salon till I come in. She doesn't dream of any danger to me here on Isola Piccola. We came on Cousin Rafael's yacht. He met me on the terrace of Villa Clytie just at the top of the spiral staircase which led down to the beach. He was in a burning rage and had just left my grandfather — tell me about him?"

I reassured her and she continued.

"When he saw me he began to swear softly. He seized my arm and dragged me down the staircase by sheer force. There was nobody on the beach but a boatload of his own men.

THE LOST PRINCESS

We rowed out to the yacht and I was locked in a suite of cabins all by myself till we reached here. The old Countess is my jailer, but a very good-natured one and I am left much to myself."

Then I told her of what had transpired since I had seen her last and, as there was no further need of concealment, I told her the entire situation, my true name and station, the threatened hostilities between Belmania and Malvers, my work in the secret service, my recent promotion and how I had come here in the guise of a lace seller. But best of all the news was that of the bond of sympathy and the complete understanding between King Theocrate and myself.

She listened with breathless attention throughout. We sat side by side on the marble seat, the cool air from the sea in our faces. Suddenly I realized she should be returning to the palace.

"And to-morrow, when you are sitting on the north portico after breakfast, I will come and try and sell you some of my fine laces," I said.

"I shall drive a sharp bargain with you, sir," she said happily, "so beware, for I am a good judge of them." She did not ask me how I planned to rescue her. She seemed content

GARDENS OF ISOLA PICCOLA

merely to know that I had come, and I was glad that she did not, for it would have been hard to confess how helpless I felt just then.

Then she smiled into my face a moment, and then I held her close and she left me and walked slowly down the gravel path toward the palace.

WHEN THE FOG LIFTED

CHAPTER IX

WHEN THE FOG LIFTED

THE next morning I liberally tipped the gate porter, ascended the ancient stone stairway leading to the front entrance of the palace and, after ingratiating myself with several servants and bestowing sundry small tokens of my appreciation of their condescension, ultimately reached the north portico where sat the Princess Clytie and an ancient but coquettishly dressed dame, the Countess, "the last of her race," who, with shattered fortunes, still managed to maintain this island estate. I bowed.

"May health be yours, Highnesses," I said. "I am a merchant of laces from Corinth. See these pieces from Malta, this Rhodes embroidery. They are yours for a song."

Where is the gentlewoman whose heart is not open to the seductions of fine lace? Mine were ones to tempt the most discerning. I spread my wares enticingly before them and

THE LOST PRINCESS

the eyes of the old Countess kindled as she examined them. The Princess and I exchanged no glance of recognition, and when the Countess went in for her purse we arranged to meet that evening in the garden. When her duenna returned, the Princess bought from me a lace handkerchief — after squeezing the price down to a preposterous figure — to our secret amusement — and the Countess some scarfs. Then I withdrew and spent the rest of the day wandering about the little village and the shores of the harbor, and vainly seeking some plan of action. Any day the Prince might come and speedy action was necessary.

That evening, as the young moon tipped with silver the tops of the cypress trees, my love and I met in the garden at the griffin seat, near the statue of Daphne. I asked her how closely she was watched.

“Why, I have the greatest freedom,” she replied. “I am allowed to wander, with my maid, about the little village below the palace grounds, to walk along the shore and even to paddle about the harbor in a skiff when the water is calm. The palace household and the fisher families are the only ones on the island, and as the peasants are all servants of the

WHEN THE FOG LIFTED

Countess and her vassals, there is no way for me to leave the island."

"Why!" I explained joyfully, "then it is too easy! All you need to do is to paddle in your skiff along the wooded shore of the bay to the north of the village to-morrow morning after the fishing boats have all put to sea. I will slip anchor, up sail, tack over to you, take you aboard, and sail gaily away with the fairy Princess."

"Unless Rafael comes," she said.

"Unless Rafael comes, of course," I replied, "and if he does we will find some other way. Could you not go to your rooms now and bring out to me under your shawl some of the things you must take with you? and to-morrow morning —"

"I can wear more of them under my gown," she finished for me, her eyes sparkling at the thought of this new adventure, and she hastened toward the palace. When she returned I took her parcel.

"My maid is already devoted to me," she whispered excitedly, "and would love to be kidnapped." Then, in mock heroics, "Courage, my hero, all will yet be well! Híst! are we discovered!" And she glared melodramati-

THE LOST PRINCESS

cally toward the marble basin where a fat bull-frog was croaking at us. "One should always say 'Hist!' in situations like this," she concluded.

Soon, very much too soon, it was time for her to go back and I saw that she would have no lack of courage. The next morning I watched with intense satisfaction the departure of the fishing boats and the fresh wind blowing so that it would be on our beam when we should leave the harbor for the open sea. The weather was perfect for the adventure, and by ten o'clock I had everything in readiness. Promptly on the hour arranged two figures put out from the palace grounds in a tiny skiff and paddled slowly along the shore. At the word, my sailors slipped our cable, raised the sails, trimmed in, and presently we were heading swiftly for the boat. As we came up to it I luffed up, and in another moment the Princess, her maid and a parcel or two were on board, and we were eased off and skimming toward the harbor mouth.

Exultantly we looked back at the receding palace on the hill and the village. If any one saw the episode there was no sign of it, and before long we were in the open sea, headed for

WHEN THE FOG LIFTED

Belmania and home. The cabin was made comfortable for our passengers, and in thirty-six hours we should be at my seaside estate.

All that day and the next we sped along with a fair wind, a smiling sky, and a smooth sea. Luncheons and dinners were served, picnic style, on deck. The Princess was in ecstasy, she sang snatches of song, explored the little vessel, chatted with the crew, and was more winsome and lovely than ever. Her maid, who had entered with enthusiasm into the adventure, became the object of marked attention from all the sailors. Stupid, good-natured, and devoted Rosa! — romance came in this way into her humdrum life and she was making the most of it. How she did coquette with Francesco the mate!

The second evening, as I was forward on some duty for a few moments, Francesco, twirling his mustachios — his facial topiary work could not be termed merely a mustache — sauntered up to me.

"Ah, my lord!" he sighed, "is she not adorable, that Rosa! I wish she were made of pastry so I could eat her. Her cheeks — cherry tartlets! her hands — vanilla merangues! Her brow — dainty custard! Adorable Rosa!"

THE LOST PRINCESS

Francesco was not ethereal in his sentiments. He had paid her the highest compliments possible to him. Rosa could hardly be called spirituelle either, and the ardent wooing of her big Francesco had its amusing aspects.

"Ah! he is the flatterer, that Francesco!" she confided to her mistress, "he calls me his dumpling, his custard apple, his *gateau glacé*. And no one loves *gateau glacé* more than he."

"And what do you call him?" asked Clytie, gravely.

"I tell him he is sleek and fat like a Bologna sausage. 'Ah! the adorable Bolognas!' he cried. 'That is indeed food for the gods and goddesses! Feast upon me, my goddess, and I will promise never to disagree with you but to sustain and comfort you always.'"

"His passion is evidently of the devouring kind," remarked Clytie.

The next morning we lay becalmed and in an inscrutable fog. The boom creaked and the sails swung idly to and fro. The barometer remained high and we knew that it was merely a passing mist. Idly the boat drifted, and after breakfast the Princess borrowed a guitar from one of the men and sang to us as

WHEN THE FOG LIFTED

we lounged on deck. Presently her sweet voice delighted us with "Addio a Bella Napoli," and we all demanded it again. As she was finishing it, I noticed that the fog was lessening rapidly. Then I saw what at first appeared a mass of it to port; then, as the fog suddenly evaporated on all sides and the sun burst forth overhead, I discovered that the shapeless mass was the white hull of a steamer. It was so close to us that we were all startled, and in another moment my men were fending us off as the wooden gunwales of our craft rubbed softly against the steel sides of the ship. No harm was done as the ship was also lying motionless.

Princess Clytie was sitting in a cane reclining chair, the guitar in her lap. Rosa crouched near her on the deck with Francesco near by, and I had been leaning against the rail. Suddenly I looked up at the towering sides of the ship and I seemed to freeze into rigidity, for there, lounging over the rail above, his face not twenty feet away, calm and smiling, stood His Serene Highness Prince Rafael of Malvers.

"I would know that sweet voice anywhere," he said pleasantly, as if we had met in a drawing-room. "I enjoyed your singing vastly,

THE LOST PRINCESS

sweet cousin," and he lifted his hat to Princess Clytie, who, like myself, was looking speechlessly up at him. "And now," he continued, with the same slightly exaggerated courtesy, "'will you walk into my parlor said the spider to the fly?'"

*PRINCE RAFAEL BECOMES MY
JAILER*



CHAPTER X

PRINCE RAFAEL BECOMES MY JAILER

FROM complete happiness and a sense of triumph at the successful accomplishment of rather a difficult piece of work, to consternation, and the deepest chagrin at this wreck of the work, only inadequately described the revulsion of feeling caused by this extraordinary and unfortunate meeting. While the ease of our escape from Isola Piccola seemed almost too good to be true, this meeting, here, by chance, on the wide waters of the Mediterranean, seemed too cruel. In another few hours we would have been safe in the shelter of my own land, and now, almost in an instant, fate reversed the glass.

"I have a piano aboard my yacht," continued the exasperating voice above us, "and Her Highness's beautiful voice will be heard to still better effect. Captain, have the gangway lowered and pipe the crew to receive visitors of honor."

THE LOST PRINCESS

There was nothing for it but to obey these veiled commands. Silently and ruefully we ascended to the deck of the yacht. Francesca went with us and, by an unexpected stroke of fortune, the Prince allowed my boat and its small crew to proceed on their way, as he believed them to be merely innocent fishermen whom I had hired more or less by chance somewhere. I had also, by luck, an opportunity while in the cabin collecting our luggage, to tell one of the sailors to make for home and get word of the affair to King Ernest.

Prince Rafael received us with every mark of courtesy. He had us so securely trapped, it evidently amused him to do so. We were given pleasant cabins opening off the main saloon, and soon we sat down with him at table to an elaborate luncheon. No allusions were made to the past save in occasional sly remarks by our host, and the yacht's course, which had evidently been laid for Isola Piccola, was reversed and our destination I could easily guess — Malvers, and, for me, the fate of the spy.

The Prince raised his wineglass to the Princess. "To your good health, dear cousin," he said. "May the change of air on your travels greatly benefit you. I thought you were a bit

PRINCE RAFAEL

dull at Villa Clytie." Then he turned to me and smiled ironically.

"To our renewed acquaintance, due to this happy meeting. When I saw you last you seemed in some slight hurry. The tap on my chin! It was nothing, I assure you. You were in a hurry and I was in the way. Your pardon, pray, for my awkwardness. Your grandfather," and he turned again to the little Princess, who was making a brave show of it, "a little touched here," and he tapped his forehead, "but otherwise in excellent health."

There was nothing for us to do but to fall into our host's mood and be outwardly, at least, as cheerful as possible, but the singing, so startlingly interrupted, was not renewed and conversation flagged. Late that afternoon we were steaming swiftly up the river into the Prince's country, and by dark we landed and proceeded in a saloon carriage on the railway to the capital of Malvers. Before midnight we arrived at the Palace I knew so well.

"The unfinished wing, which perhaps you remember, Captain"—Prince Rafael grinned at me—"is rapidly nearing completion. We are having a new stained-glass window put in to

THE LOST PRINCESS

replace the one you — er — which met with an accident.”

I am afraid none of my repartee that day was especially brilliant.

To my surprise, I was assigned a remarkably snug suite of rooms, consisting of a living room with books and a piano, bedroom and bath. The Princess had a floor in the west wing with Rosa. Francesco was to be my own valet. How clumsy and stupid he appeared in that ornate palace! But I was glad to have him nevertheless.

My host was modern to the finger tips. That he intended to put me to death shortly as a spy was a matter of course. A very informal court martial would suffice. But in the meantime, instead of being imprisoned in the fortress, it suited his whim to lodge me in luxury in his own palace. And here I lodged in mortification and miserable restlessness for weeks. Worry about the Princess Clytie, ignorance as to what was going on outside, and the uncertainty of my own fate did not give me a pleasant frame of mind. I rehearsed in my mind every detail of events which had led up to this situation, but if there were mistakes in my actions, I could not decide where, and it

PRINCE RAFAEL

was some slight satisfaction to think that, if I were to live the past months over again, I would probably, in my stupidity, do precisely the same as I had done.

The attitude of the Prince toward me puzzled me vastly at first. It would be natural for him to make short shift of me. I was a spy who had escaped to my own country bearing important military secrets, after I had masqueraded as an officer in his own army and had lived treacherously in his own household. The evidence was indisputable. Yet, instead of prison, a court martial and a file of soldiers, here I was being treated in every way, except for my freedom, as a welcome guest, dining with his household and receiving frequent calls from him. The Princess, too, I saw almost daily, and while there seemed to be no restraint upon my seeing her alone if I wished, there were few opportunities for this. We did, however, have an occasional talk together, and these were my only solace and comfort.

One afternoon as I sat disconsolately in my living room, His Serene Highness was announced and my inscrutable host entered, his handsome but sinister face unusually animated.

"Ah, Colonel!" he exclaimed genially, seat-

THE LOST PRINCESS

ing himself and lighting a cigarette, "all goes well! We shall soon now have a merry war."

"War?" I queried listlessly. Why should he confide anything of importance to me, and why should I believe anything he said?

"Yes, indeed!" he replied, rubbing his hands and exhaling blue vapor from his lungs. "My ministers have at last consented to let me try to take unequivocal possession of that pleasant and prosperous valley, Monverto, lying on the borderland between Malvers and Belmania, the suzerainty to which has been so long in dispute."

"In dispute" indeed! He had no rightful claim to the valley which had been in former years one of the choicest and most peaceful portions of King Ernest's domain.

"I have long been poaching upon it," he continued genially, "but King Ernest has latterly been claiming it, and his army is too closely matched to our own in strength to make the final settlement of the question practicable for us till now."

"And now?"

"Now I shall have some slight outside help," and he eyed me sharply.

"Indeed," was all I said.

PRINCE RAFAEL

"From Pavonia. They are to send me a transport with a couple of regiments of mountaineers. It will be a small affair in any case, and these two regiments will make the undertaking entirely successful."

I felt more cheerful. Now he was surely lying to me. Imagine King Theocrite sending two regiments of picked troops to the man who had violently and outrageously abducted his grandchild and who was holding her a prisoner.

"King Theocrite must be exceedingly good-natured and forgiving in disposition," I remarked, in my turn lighting a cigarette.

"Oh, it is not King Theocrite himself," he said, as if slightly hurt at my tone of incredulity. "You have not heard? The King has latterly been decidedly — er — queer here," and he tapped his forehead. "He has been eccentric for years and he has lately had a severe mental decline. He tells some weird tale about his granddaughter being abducted by myself, but they of course realize the absurdity of that. Imagine my doing such a thing just at a time when I wish my royal cousin's aid! Then, too, there are those harps he prates about. He is incapable of attending properly to the

THE LOST PRINCESS

duties of his high office. His ministers have arranged a regency and so the Princess Clytie, his only heir, has been proclaimed regent, but as they believe that she is at present paying a visit to her relations in this capital and is ill with typhoid fever so that she cannot be notified just now of the change, they are, as it were, running things themselves. The King himself does not know of the change. He lives at the villa and they bring him fictitious papers now and then to sign, and he occasionally presides at a mock council of state. He is happy with his harps and his books, dear old cousin," and Prince Rafael emitted a hollow sigh.

I was now decidedly startled. The tale sounded quite probable. The ministerial council had certainly favored joining in the war. And yet why should this important news be confided to me, an enemy?

"The transport is due shortly, my own army is being mobilized and will be ready for the field when our friends arrive. Let me see, we shall use one regiment of light artillery; two of mountaineers — not counting our Pavonian friends; one of infantry; one light cavalry —" and he enumerated in detail the

PRINCE RAFAEL

composition and numbers of the attacking force. He even sketched out the plan of campaign and remarked incidentally that, while Belmania knew somewhat of these preparations, they were in total ignorance of the coming of the transport, whose aid would be especially valuable because it would not be reckoned with by Belmania. When the Prince had bidden me a graceful adieu and strolled out, I began to realize the true import of his call.

It was a subtle and effective way of causing me to realize that *it would hereafter do no harm to confide any state secret to me*. What more excruciating way could be found to announce to a man of common sense that he would shortly cease to exist! Yes indeed, the Prince was eminently modern in externals. Medieval and barbaric as he was at heart, savage in his passions and emotions, he was refined to a degree in worldly ways. The times of stone cell, the bed of straw, and physical torture were passed. Mental torture was now realized to be far more terrible, and in this highly refined way was my host telling me that it was totally unnecessary to keep information of value to my own country from me, as my own country would never see me again.

A GAME OF BILLIARDS

CHAPTER XI

A GAME OF BILLIARDS

THE palace of Prince Rafael was a huge, gray stone pile fronting on a small public square, paved with tiny cobble stones and surrounded with masonry buildings with colonades, under which were shops and cafés, above which were apartments. This square was in the center of the city and, leading directly away from it, was the main thoroughfare, populous, and with tram line which circled around one side of the square and passed along behind the palace, alongside the gardens which were in the rear and through which I had fled on the occasion of my former visit. Several of the officers of the royal household, with their wives, were lodged in the palace, and it was the custom of the Prince, who was a bachelor, to dine each evening in the great dining-room, surrounded with a brilliant gathering of people. Both the Princess Clytie

THE LOST PRINCESS

and I had the freedom of the building and grounds, but we were of course under surveillance and no allusions were made to me of my previous life there. Even Baron Cassel and General Klauber — the latter having received a pistol wound in the arm during the *mêlée* when I upset the card table that memorable evening of my escape — were uniformly cordial to me. I wore civilian clothes and tailors had come to supply me with all that I needed, and I presume that my fair fellow prisoner had similar privileges as she was always charmingly gowned. During the day the palace was rather quiet as most of the men were away, busy with their several duties, but in the late afternoon and in the evenings there was a cheerful hum and activity within doors.

One evening the Princess Clytie had a little conversation with a certain young lady in the household who had been absent when we first arrived. She was none other than Mademoiselle Althea de Beaupre. They were sitting together in one of the card rooms, in a window seat, chatting carelessly on various themes.

"Colonel Krag seems to be in good favor once more," remarked the latter casually. "Colonel Krag" had been my assumed name

A GAME OF BILLIARDS

when I posed as an officer in the Malvers army.

"Did you know him when he was here?" asked Princess Clytie innocently.

Mademoiselle de Beaupré toyed with the window draperies.

"Yes," she answered slowly, "we were good friends. The Colonel is an agreeable man. In fact — do you not feel that he is in extreme danger? It troubles me considerably."

"I have no means of knowing," was the guarded reply. "Do you?"

"The Colonel has changed in some ways," said Mlle. de Beaupré, "toward me at least."

"Toward you?"

"Yes, he hardly speaks to me now, while before —" and she looked expressively at the Princess. "There was a time when I thought —" and she smiled musingly.

"Indeed," said the Princess, "How interesting!"

"Of course I could not have married him anyway, I have royal blood in me, and now, of course, it is most fortunate —"

"Most fortunate indeed," concluded the Princess, and rose. And that same evening she sat with me in that very window seat and

THE LOST PRINCESS

told me all that the Mlle. de Beaupre had insinuated, and concluded by saying: "And now, Karl dear, I am only telling you this to show you that I do not care one bit if you ever were in the slightest in love with her. She is a beautiful and attractive girl — though it wasn't nice of her to have said that to me. But she probably had some deep purpose and was told to do so by Rafael. And even if you thought you were in love with her, you found out that you were mistaken, didn't you, dear?"

How I longed for the seclusion of the garden of Isola Piccola as I told her that though I had been attracted by the Countess, my most serious flirtation with her was when I had had an eye to business all the time, and that business was the securing of the packet. I told her how our coquetting had ended with the surrender by her of the packet, and Clytie already knew in how short a time this clever woman had won it back from me. And I told her that I knew love for the first time in the gardens of Villa Clytie. And she believed me, for it was true, and she was a woman and knew it was true.

"Dear Princess," I said, "whatever happens to me, I shall have the comfort of knowing

A GAME OF BILLIARDS

that you love me. They may try to misrepresent me to you, to prove various things about me in order to destroy my character, but I shall know that you will know that I am a man, honestly trying to do his duty, and that now and forever I love you and you only, with my whole heart."

"I know it and I too shall be true," she whispered, "you need never fear;" and our hands pressed each other in the shadow of the curtain.

That evening Prince Rafael and I happened to meet alone in the billiard room and he challenged me to a game. We were well matched and the score grew rapidly.

"My ball represents Malvers," he remarked, "the red one, Pavonia. See, I shall touch the red and score off yours, which is Belmania."

"You will miss," I said.

He played and missed.

"You were a little elusive," he laughed, "but I have another play."

"I will play off the red and put you in a corner," I said, and did so, but the other two balls rolled close to his.

"Ah! I have you where I want you, my dear

THE LOST PRINCESS

Colonel," he exclaimed, and made several points, failing just short of score.

"And at the last, I win," I said confidently, and ran out the game.

"Very pretty, but *this* is only billiards," and he put up his cue.

"Your Highness," I asked bluntly, "why do you keep the Princess here?"

"Why do I keep Princess Clytie here?" he answered lightly, "how dull of you not to guess! She is now Regent of Pavonia, but in her absence and during her unfortunate, severe illness, certified to by my court physician," and he smiled ironically, "her ministers, who are more in sympathy with my plans than I fear she would be, act in her stead. Hence the transport, now on the way. Then, too, when I have whipped Belmania, when my revered and royal cousin demises and when I become, in addition to being reigning Prince of Malvers, Prince Consort of Pavonia by marrying the Princess Clytie, or rather, Queen Clytie, I shall—to return to our billiard analogy—be the only player with all three balls. I shall be a little emperor and hobnob with Franz Joseph and Kaiser Wilhelm."

"I am glad you keep in mind the billiard

A GAME OF BILLIARDS

analogy," I replied defiantly. "By all means, do not forget how the game ended."

"But in the real game to come, *you* may not be there, my dear Colonel," he replied suavely. And with these ominous words left the room.

RAFAEL PREPARES FOR WAR

CHAPTER XII

RAFAEL PREPARES FOR WAR

AND now events began to march again. The following day I was sitting in my living-room which overlooked — through a window, protected by ornamental iron bars — the street with the tram line on it, running down alongside the palace and directly away from the public square in the front. Suddenly a sound drew my attention. It was a distant rumble which rapidly grew more definite, then a faint jingle and metallic clatter mingled with it, and strains of music. I ran to the open window. The bars bowed outward so that I could look down into the street. In the distance, far below the garden, a regiment was approaching. It was of infantry, and presently ten companies, in brown campaign uniform in heavy marching order, swung past and formed just out of sight, around the front corner of the palace, in the square. Then from the side street

THE LOST PRINCESS

opposite me I heard the rumble of artillery, a mountain battery, gatlings, caissons, and powerful horses, artillerymen and buglers in green and red, and several powerful wagons, came noisily along and turned to the left into the square. Then another company of infantry, and from all sides the populace came running. Windows grew full of faces, and then suddenly all the noise ceased at once. I could not, of course, see the troops in the square, but I guessed that the Prince was speaking to them from the front balcony, the one from which I had climbed into his window. Then the tumult began, but none of the troops returned my way. The reason was obvious, they were going to the front! It was war then at last! How much of those preparations did my own King know about? Had hostilities been declared or had these regiments merely been sent up into the mountains to the frontier? The Prince had been unusually busy for several days, but, as my liberty had been somewhat restricted, I knew little of what was going on. I had been given to realize that it was desired that I spend more of my time in my rooms.

A day or so later, several squadrons of cavalry, lancers, mounted infantry, and a com-

RAFAEL PREPARES FOR WAR

pany of city troops swung gaily past and were likewise reviewed in the square. Later, hospital corps, ambulances, and great, yellow canvas-covered commissary wagons rumbled through the streets. The palace seemed full of officers hurriedly going and coming and, all the time, I chafed in my rooms, idle, ignorant of what was about to happen, straining my ears for the tread of troops and conjecturing the composition of the army being sent to the front. The dinners in the great dining hall ceased and I saw the Princess Clytie infrequently and never alone, but I saw that she was anxious and she knew that I was. Days passed and, during each, some detachment of soldiers left the city.

One day there was extraordinary noise and excitement. The streets were lined with the Prince's subjects from an early hour, who waited patiently in the warm, autumn sunshine. About noon, far down the street, toward the river, a hoarse roar rose louder and louder, and soon I was standing in my window, gnawing my fingers nervously and watching two smart and business-like regiments, in totally different uniforms from the others, pass by below. They were the Pavonian mountaineers, sappers and miners, sharpshooters, and a string of great

THE LOST PRINCESS

mules, laden with dismantled cannon, tents, and commissary supplies. The shouts rose to the skies, every hat in the street came off and was waved frantically in the air. The two regiments, in their yellow uniforms, paraded in the square, aggravatingly just around the corner so that I could not see them, and again presumably Prince Rafael addressed them, for there was an intense silence for a few moments, then cheers by the visitors, and then the entire city seemed to explode into noise. Bells in the steeples rang, whistles blew, cannon boomed in the distance, and the huzzas rose from every street.

And so the Prince had not lied to me! Pavonia had really sent help to Malvers and war was about to begin! Undoubtedly, even if it were not formally declared, my own dear land, lying so near, just across the mountain range, was equally active in military preparations, for the secret service system of which I had been at the head must have known much of what was transpiring here. And meanwhile, I, who might be leading my own regiment of the guards to the front, was imprisoned, eating my soul out in useless and impotent inactivity! And all because a white fog had settled for a

RAFAEL PREPARES FOR WAR

few hours one morning upon the placid waters of the Mediterranean, and a fair young girl had sung "Addio a Bella Napoli!"

It was easy to speculate as to what now would happen. The Prince could not much longer remain in the palace. His principality was a small one and he would be needed at the front personally to direct operations and inspire his army with enthusiasm. It had amused him, in order to punish me for the deadly insult of the blow upon his royal chin and my work as a spy, insidiously to bring to me the realization that my life was forfeit, constantly to tantalize me with a sham liberty and to impose upon me the most irksome of all forms of imprisonment. But now the time for all that had passed. Before he left, a drumhead court-martial would be in order, and then I would face a file of soldiers and the little game I had played so futilely would be over forever. I realized, as never before, how sweet was life. Since love had come into it the world had been fairer than ever. I thought of my family estate, the ancient castle perched on the rocks overlooking the sea, the woods with the wind-blown trees, the little village on the shore where my peasant-tenants lived, my gray-haired sister left

THE LOST PRINCESS

lonely and forlorn, and the ultimate dying out of the family, of my new office as Colonel of King Ernest's household troops and the brilliant career that might have been before me. But sweetest of all the pictures were those of the ancient garden near Valdecosta, the broad marble terrace of Villa Clytie, now drenched with hot southern sunshine and again lying pale and glimmering in the moonlight, and always a dear, slender, girlish figure, in clinging white garments, glorified the scene, and I shut my eyes and clenched my hands in silent anguish.

Escape! I must, I would escape somehow! But how? Every moment when outside my rooms I was under strict guard. I had eluded them once, they would not be taken unaware a second time. I racked my brains for some way in vain. *But I would live!* Death should not come to me now! The game was not yet finished. And courage came back to me once more.

*THE MYSTERY OF MONVERTO
HALL*

CHAPTER XIII

THE MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL

THE next morning Francesco brought some of my trousers which he had been pressing for me. The first time he assayed this unfamiliar office, he had ironed them "fore and aft" so that they were as flat as a pancake and the creases ran down the sides. But he was learning — this faithful Francesco. He no longer brushed my hat with my hair brushes. I saw that he had something on his mind and presently he spoke:

"Lord Karl," he said, "do you remember years ago, before the old king died, — Heaven hold him! — there was a fine estate on the borderland, in the mountains, where Count Monverto lived, he who was slain while hunting stag in the forest?"

"I remember the name," I replied listlessly, "but I do not think I ever knew him."

"It was a sad story," he sighed, "I knew

THE LOST PRINCESS

him well. My father was a gamekeeper to him and I lived in a cabin in the forests. Ah! never were there such forests, they were the finest in the land. The timber was thick and trackless, the streams were many and trout filled them. Waterfalls were in the hills and the mosses and flowers grew thick in the grass. We could roam for miles and never see aught but dark forests with wild hare, squirrels, birds, and deer. Ah, what lordly stag the old Count would shoot, and many were the lords who visited him! Even kings came. Yes, kings, our old king, the father of King Ernest, and the father of this damned — your pardon Lord Karl, — of Rafael, fiery old Augustus — may seven devils —” he paused abruptly, then continued:

“Baron Monverto and his wife had only one child, a daughter, a beautiful fleet-limbed little girl who could ride and shoot with the best of them. They sent her to Rome to school, and when she came back ah! how proud they were of her! She could sing and speak in strange tongues, but she had not forgotten how to ride after the stag or even to spear the wild boar. How well I remember her, in her brown velveteen gown, her brown hair flying in the

MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL

wind as she rode her brown mare with young Prince Ernest, when he came with his father to hunt."

"Prince Ernest!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, indeed, Prince Ernest. They were lovers. Ah! I knew it well enough," and Francesco wagged his head wisely. "Her father and mother suspected it too and were glad, for they had fine blood in them and the match would not have been a bad one for the brave young prince. And certainly the old King did not mind their riding together through the forests or sitting cracking nuts of an autumn evening, in the portrait hall.

"And then trouble came. It seems the Baron's estates lay directly on the borderland between Belmania and Malvers, or at least no one knew exactly just where the border was, for the Devil drew the boundary and planted trouble and evil instead of stone marking posts. Old Prince Augustus of Malvers claimed to be suzerain of the estate because he coveted the forests with their stags and wild boars, and he, too, came often to visit the Baron, and with him came young Prince Rafael and they all hunted in the forests together. But Prince Rafael and the beautiful young countess rode

THE LOST PRINCESS

little together, for he was ill-favored in manner. He was rude and surly and grew angry easily, and when he grew angry he would sulk and no one might speak to him for hours. And the more Prince Augustus came the more envious he grew of the estate, and yet the lord of it was a man of mettle and was not afraid to say it lay in Belmania and not Malvers. But Augustus would swear and claim that it was Malvers land. And so matters grew worse between them; but still he came often to hunt the stag.

“And then one day something dreadful happened. I was a young man then and cleaned the guns and led the dogs, and one day I came upon Augustus whispering with some men in the forest. I lay behind a rock and they did not see me. The men wore the livery of Baron Monverto’s rangers, but they were not the Baron’s men. They were strange faces and had come secretly into the forests. That afternoon, Prince Augustus and the young Prince Rafael left for home, and a few days later our King, the old King, and Prince Ernest came, and all was merry in the Hall. The day following, a mild spring day, with the snow lying in patches in the dark places in the woods, they all went hunting, and the

MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL

little Princess, the Baron's daughter, with her brown hair flying and her cheeks rosy in the wind, rode with Prince Ernest. The stag were wild and the party became separated. Suddenly there was an accident, and the Princess found her father shot in the head and lying dead in the snow, which was red underneath him. Prince Ernest was standing near him, pale and frightened and — oh, I knew it was not he who had shot him accidentally. Did not the strange gamekeepers prowl the woods that day, and did they not then take themselves off, never to be seen again?

“But every one seemed to go crazy and no one knew what any one else said, and sorrow filled the old Hall that night as never before; and the next day the Prince Ernest and his father left. They knew that a crime had been committed somehow, but *I* only, knew how, and I could not help matters, — I, a poor peasant lad who cleaned the guns and led the dogs. Then more troubles came to the Baroness. A few months later lawyers came, they said from Belmania, but I felt sure they were hired by Augustus, and the title of the estate was quarreled over and finally declared to be bad, and the Hall and the forests with their stags

THE LOST PRINCESS

and boars and trout streams were claimed by a mean-visaged stranger. The Baroness knew nothing of business and was too crushed with sorrow over her lord's death to care much how things went. Besides, her lawyers were bribed. She could not stand it all and soon she died, thinking our old King had cruelly wronged her and Prince Ernest had slain her husband, being but a boy and perhaps careless with the rifle, and had not been man enough to confess it. All this time the old King lay sick in his palace in Belmania, and he too died, as you know, and his son knew nothing of what was going on, for he seldom left his father's side. And all the time he mourned that the Countess had thought of him so unjustly. He was proud and had given his word that he was innocent. But who could blame the little Countess that night after she had seen her father lying there, dead in the snow?

"So the estate was seized and the peasants were all sent off. I wandered to the coast and took service with you. The little Countess, hating everything connected with Belmania, went to live with an aunt in a distant part of Malvers."

"And what became of her?" I asked.

MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL

"After awhile her aunt died and it was necessary for her to do something. Prince Rafael gave her employment."

"Indeed," I said. "How do you know?"
Where is she?"

"She is here in the palace. I see her every day. So do you."

"Here in the palace!" I exclaimed, "which is she?"

"The old Baron's full title," Francesco said slowly, looking straight at me, "was Baron Monverto and Count de Beaupre."

"Mlle. de Beaupre!" I cried astounded. The room seemed to swim around me. I was dazed with the throng of ideas, conjectures, possibilities which rushed upon me. Here indeed might be the key to the whole situation, thus unexpectedly found through the humble offices of Francesco! Had this ingenuous servant of mine put into my possession knowledge of a fact which, trivial as it might seem, could be of more importance to my king and country than anything I had accomplished? Thoughts rushed through my mind as he stood there absently brushing imaginary dust from one of my coats, and presently I began to realize things.

THE LOST PRINCESS

First of all there was not a moment to lose. I sprang up and literally dragged him from the room.

"Come with me!" I cried; but as I opened the door leading into the hall outside, I turned and whispered, "We must not let any one think we are in a hurry, however."

We sauntered slowly along to one of the stairways in the wing where I was lodged, one of my guards, who was always near my door, following at a discreet distance. We descended to the main floor which was just above the entresol and then passed to the front of the palace into the great hall. How could I find Mlle. de Beaupre? It was absolutely necessary that I should see her at once. We wandered indolently along, and by one of those chance strokes of fortune which, while being apparently of no significance, sometimes change the entire trend of events, we came face to face with the woman we sought as she was coming in from a drive.

She bowed with that subtle commingling of courtesy and defiance which had marked her demeanor to me latterly, and paused half awkwardly for a moment's greeting. The guard, seeing her, slipped away into an adjoining

MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL

corridor somewhere, and I chatted a moment, then whispered:

"Mademoiselle, I must see you for a few moments alone. It is of the utmost importance to you yourself as well as to me."

"Must?" she queried, raising her eyebrows. Then evidently seeing in my manner something that interested her, she flitted into a little card room and motioned me to follow. I did so and closed the door behind me, Francesco coming too.

"Mademoiselle," I began, "Francesco tells me that you once lived in my own country."

"Your servant?" she exclaimed, glancing at him, "pray what does he know about it?"

"Mademoiselle," said Francesco, "do you not remember Rudolfo, the old gamekeeper at Monverto Hall? I am his son. I cleaned the guns and led the dogs."

As she heard these words an incredible change seemed to take place in the entire appearance of the young woman. I had always thought her beautiful. She had a tall, slender, athletic figure, and had always a certain touch to her clothes that is described as "smart." She had a wealth of glorious brown hair that shone and glinted with life. Her face was perhaps a

THE LOST PRINCESS

trifle too thin, but her features were delicately moulded, her eyes restless and expressive, though with a trace of hardness and cynicism in them. It was, in fact, this subtle suggestion of cynicism that marred her beauty. One realized that she was "critical" and cold. Life had seemed to hold no illusions to her. This aspect instantly changed. As she stared speechless at Francesco her eyes grew soft and wistful, and shone as if tears lay deep within them. Her entire personality seemed to throw off its mask of stern reserve and to grow sweet and girlish. I looked on, spellbound, for I realized that a miracle was taking place. She ceased to be merely a type of the world of fashion and high life, and she became — just a woman, as suddenly, without warning, a vivid picture of a life she had long tried to forget had been so vividly recalled to her. She stretched out her hand, which trembled, and Francesco came to her, knelt and took it and held it, to his lips.

"Countess Althea," he murmured brokenly, "my service."

She turned to me with shining eyes.

"Tell me," she said — and how sweet her voice was! — "tell me what this all means."

MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL

"Tell her, Francesco, tell her all," I ordered him.

"Highness," he said, "I have known you ever since I came here. How could I forget you? Did I not bring your pony out for you in the good old days up in the mountains, when you would go riding in the forests with Prince Ernest?"

At the mention of the Prince, I saw her hands suddenly clasp tightly as they lay in her lap.

"Did I not remain until the last, till, after the old Baron and his lady had died, you had been driven out of your home by King Augustus and Prince Rafael?"

"Not by them!" she cried, "but by —" then she paused, startled at the expression of Francesco's face.

"By them and no other!" he cried passionately, "by those two black devils who belonged in Hell — I will say it if I hang for it! *They* murdered your father, *they* killed your mother who died of a broken heart, and *they* took Monverto away from you!" Then in a flood of innate eloquence he poured out the whole story as he had done to me, but far more vividly. With white face and set lips, down each side of which deepened a line in the cheek, speechless,

THE LOST PRINCESS

enthralled, sat Althea de Beaupre, listening for the first time to the true story of her wrecked life. When he had finished, she cried:

“But how do you know that it was the Prince of Malvers and not the Prince of Belmania who did these things? How do I know that you are not mistaken?”

For answer, Francesco unbuttoned the collar of his shirt and tugged at a thick and, it must be confessed, sadly soiled cord that hung about his massive neck. Slowly and reluctantly, evidently catching here and there against some concealed button, up came a small leather wallet, which he opened.

“I have worn it all these years — twelve years next spring — against my — against my heart — your pardon, Highness.”

He took out and carefully unfolded a paper, covered with writing.

“When the officers — Malvers’ officers,” — he continued, “were ransacking Monverto Hall, after they had driven you away, I was dusting out one of the rooms, and two or three of them were sitting at a table looking over some papers. This one fell over the edge upon the floor near me. I put my broom upon it, then got it under my foot, then I swept a pile

MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL

of dust upon it and, in my pan, carried it out of the room. I am an ignorant man and cannot read, but I knew it was in Prince Rafael's writing, for I had carried many of his letters to the post when he used to visit us. Here is the paper, Highness," and he handed it to her.

The Countess and I bent over it eagerly. It was a memorandum of a letter to his father which Rafael had written, referring to and asking questions about the very plot which Francesco had just revealed. It proved conclusively that my servant had, at least in the main points, been absolutely accurate. When we had deciphered it, the girl looked vacantly at it for several minutes, and now and then cast quick glances at Francesco. I could imagine the visions she saw, — pictures of her girlhood days, the romantic forests with their cascades, the homelike rooms in the great stone castle, now desolate and empty, her parents, her pony and her lover, the handsome young prince who had ridden away from her, mortally wounded at heart because he had given her his word and she had not believed him. Through these pictures must have flitted the sinister figures of the two men who had stolen all happiness from her life, and in the palace of one of whom she

THE LOST PRINCESS

was now living, regarding him as her benefactor.

Presently she folded her arms on the card table beside her, buried her face in them and cried her heart out, as only a woman who has a true heart can cry. Francesco, too, kept wiping his eyes and shuffling his feet, and I stared out of the window, with a lump in my throat.

After a while she looked up and her face was quiet, for she had regained control of herself.

"But why was it that Prince Ernest did nothing?" she asked.

"He knew nothing of it," said Francesco. "For weeks his father the King lay dying and Prince Ernest scarcely left him. He was a Prince who loved his father. He supposed that you had sold the estate to King Augustus and, though the boundary was in dispute, he allowed Malvers to claim it. He has never been in that part of the country since, and," he sighed significantly, "he has never married."

Althea sprang to her feet.

"There is much to be done," she cried, "pray God it is not too late! To-morrow Rafael goes to the front. And you!—" she turned to me, a sudden look of terror in her

MYSTERY OF MONVERTO HALL

face — “but I shall save you whatever happens! Do not be afraid,” and she held out her hand to me, “I have a great deal of authority here and I shall find some way to aid you. I betrayed you before,” she half sobbed, “this time I shall make amends.”

Then she gained control of herself again, this time completely. “I must go now,” and I opened the door for her.

All that day there was an incessant going and coming within the palace. Out doors, there was the ominous rumble of moving troops and the galloping of mounted military messengers. I had no opportunity of seeing the Princess Clytie, and that afternoon two officers came quietly to my room and placed me under arrest. I was to be tried on the following morning, by court martial, under the charge of being a spy from Belmania, caught *in flagrante delicto* here in Malvers.

***"A FIGHTING CHANCE FOR
A MAN LIKE YOU"***

CHAPTER XIV

"A FIGHTING CHANCE FOR A MAN LIKE YOU"

THAT night I spent in the military prison in an uncomfortable cell, and I slept but little. I knew, of course, what the result of the court martial would be and that my only hope to escape immediate death lay in the Countess de Beaupre. That she would do everything in her power to rescue me was to be depended upon, as her hatred for Rafael and everything connected with his principality would be but natural after what she had learned. But it seemed doubtful if even her power would avail. I was far from losing heart, however, and looked confidently toward some unexpected development.

The next morning the court martial took place in the adjoining barracks. The Prince himself presided and it was a short and business-like affair. I was convicted and ordered to be shot at daybreak on the following day. Then

THE LOST PRINCESS

the Prince departed for more important business and I went back to my cell, over which a guard was set.

The events that transpired elsewhere that day I of course only learned about afterward. That afternoon Prince Rafael and his personal staff left the city, amid intense enthusiasm, for the front. The gay life inside the palace ceased. Many of the officers who were quartered there had been ordered to active service, the ladies had retired to their various homes, most of them country estates, and only a few necessary officials remained. The Princess Clytie remained, still with movements carefully restricted, and in the general care of the Countess Althea.

That evening the two girls were alone in the private sitting-room of the latter. They had been drawn together by a common interest — my own fate. What slight antagonism there had been between them had disappeared that afternoon, for Althea had gone to Clytie's rooms and poured out her story. So that evening the two sat forlornly together before the fire. Clytie had perfect control of herself and her wits were keyed to an intense pitch as she discussed with her new friend every phase

A FIGHTING CHANCE

of the situation. And the problem of rescuing from death a man who was already guarded in his death cell was not an easy one; even had I been in the palace the task would have been hard enough, but I was in another part of the city in the military fortress.

The sitting-room was a large and pleasant one. Near the fireplace stood a study table with a few books, papers, and a typewriter upon it, for Althea did most of the Prince's more confidential official correspondence. Clytie was idly fingering some of the papers and happened to notice that one, a small, typewritten sheet, had the Prince's signature at the end. Suddenly a thought struck her.

"What is this?" she cried.

"Only an order for some tents," replied Althea carelessly.

"Why could you not erase the typewriting with that acid you use and type something else upon it, above the signature?" she asked.

"I could easily enough — why, what do you mean?" asked Althea.

"Then," cried Clytie, springing up in her excitement, "type an order to have Karl sent here at once for further examination. This is the Prince's letter-head and here is his signa-

THE LOST PRINCESS

ture. It would *have* to be honored. Have him sent to the Prince's study where you and I can receive him, have the guard wait outside. You can pretend that General Klauber is in the study. Then you can find some way to smuggle him out of the palace!" She glared excitedly at Althea, as the details formed themselves in her imagination. "He can tie you to a chair and gag you, and so you would not be suspected at all in the matter afterward."

Althea listened breathlessly. They discussed details feverishly, then Althea went to work on the paper and soon it was a most plausible document which would surely do its beneficent work. Althea herself delivered it to the concierge at the door on the ground floor and saw to it that an orderly was sent galloping off with it. The palace was almost empty that night and, their master being away, nearly every one of the household was out at the theaters or the cafés. While they waited, the two conspirators, who with such courage were so tempting fate, discussed the arrangements in the plan of escape. Francesco, who was mournfully packing up my effects in my rooms and wondering what he should do with them, and Rosa were sent for, and the four flew about in making all

A FIGHTING CHANCE

possible preparations. In the midst of them, Clytie suddenly exclaimed:

"If Karl escapes to-night, why shouldn't I go with him? I *can't* stay here any longer and I am going too!"

Althea looked at her aghast, but Clytie continued:

"And Francesco and Rosa shall go with us! We will all ride to the mountains together and when we reach the frontier we shall be safe."

Meanwhile I was sitting in my dark little cell absolutely powerless to save myself from the death awaiting me at daybreak, and keeping my courage up by believing that a woman's wit would save me, for a man's power and strength is usually of small avail when pitted against the subtlety of a woman who has suddenly learned to hate him. Then, too, I relied on the additional help of Clytie's resourceful mind, and so my heart gave a triumphant little thump as the iron door to my cell suddenly rattled open, and in the light of their lanterns I saw a corporal's guard and received the brief order to accompany it.

We emerged from the prison into the showery, chilly air of the mid-autumn evening and, in a patrol wagon, were whirled across the city to

THE LOST PRINCESS

the palace. I was taken up a private stairway and emerged into the great hall on the main floor which ran along behind the row of apartments in the front of the palace, whose front windows overlooked the public square. The corporal knocked at the door of the Prince's private study directly in the middle of the front and facing the great marble stairway on the other and rear side of the hall. The door was opened by the Prince's confidential secretary, Mlle. de Beaupre. There might have been several of the Prince's officers inside for all the corporal knew. He saluted.

"The prisoner is here, Highness," he reported.

Althea motioned me to enter.

"Retire to the service hall, Corporal," she ordered, "and await orders."

The door closed behind me and I heard the tread of the retreating footsteps. Then I was conscious of nothing else in the world but a pair of soft arms around my neck and the Princess Clytie sobbing on my shoulder.

"Karl, Karl," she whispered, and "Sweet-heart!" I replied, as I put my arms about her and held her close.

Then presently I looked up and saw, in

A FIGHTING CHANCE

another part of the brilliantly lighted room, their backs turned discreetly, Althea, Francesco, and Rosa whispering excitedly together. Clytie and I walked over to them.

"Does this mean a fighting chance?" I asked.

Althea turned and held out both hands to me. Her eyes shone and an unwonted sweetness lay in them.

"A fighting chance!" she cried, "and such a fight as a man like you can win! And are you willing to fight for others too?"

"Others?" I questioned, nonplussed.

"Yes, for me, for Rosa and Francesco," said Clytie. "We are going with you." Then seeing a look of apprehension and doubt in my face, she cried piteously:

"My poor grandfather! Ill, broken-hearted, alone, mourning for me in Villa Clytie, not knowing if I am dead or alive! Karl, I cannot be kept here any longer. Take me with you!"

She did not, of course, know of the mental condition of Theocrite, or the pleasant fiction of her severe illness, certified to by the court physicians, with which Rafael had been deluding Theocrite's councilors. She suspected that the letters to him which she had written and which her captor had promised her to have

THE LOST PRINCESS

duly delivered had never reached him, and of course she had had no direct word from him. But her heart told her he was suffering for her, and tears came to her eyes as she pleaded with me.

"Tell me your plans," I replied.

Here indeed was an adventure of the utmost gravity, and, if I were to be responsible for others as well as myself, I must know just what lay before me. There was not a moment to lose and the situation was rapidly explained to me. Francesco had brought surreptitiously to these apartments some of my clothes suitable for traveling, a warm suit, stout boots, traveling cap, gloves and accessories, and, best of all, two revolvers and ammunition which he had purloined somewhere. The Princess Clytie was already dressed for what lay before her and so were the two servants. Over our clothes we were to put on, for our escape from the palace, liveries such as the under servants wore below stairs. Francesco and I had, for instance, jackets and overalls of blue and white striped cotton cloth, and caps and aprons. We were to pass from the study through a series of adjoining apartments toward the right wing of the palace, thence into the servants' corridor,

A FIGHTING CHANCE

down-stairs and out through a small side entrance to the street, where horses, provided by Althea, were already waiting for us. In the dark little hall running out toward this door, we were to shed our servant's garb, as the only chance of any one in the palace seeing us was a chance encounter of some servant as we descended the service staircase, and Althea had arranged to have it as dark as possible.

Once outside, on horseback and in ordinary civilian attire, we need attract no attention because none of us were known outside the palace. We were to ride across the city, through the park to the foot of the pass which I had climbed on the occasion of my former escape, and it was calculated that an hour's start would enable us to mount it to the frontier and cross into my own country, where we would be safe. The plan was perfectly practical. The condition of the city that particular night made circumstances especially favorable. The last troops for the war had just gone to the front, and after so many days of unusual excitement the streets were almost deserted. The way seemed so clear and the details had been so completely worked out by these two clever women that I agreed to take Clytie and the two

THE LOST PRINCESS

servants with me, to their inexpressible joy. Even if the sortie failed, they would probably not come to serious harm in any case.

"But how about you?" I demanded, turning to Althea, "your part in this will soon be known and what will happen to you?"

"You are to tie me to a chair and gag me loosely. After you have had half an hour's start, I will scream, the guards will break open the door, find me helpless and the desperate prisoner escaped. They will not, of course, suspect me for awhile, and no one will think of anything but following you. It will be an hour before they actually start. Then I shall have all the rest of the night to myself and I can leave quietly, in my own way. Don't fear for me," and she smiled proudly, "I shall turn up safely in Belmania in a day or so."

"In Belmania!" I cried joyfully, "then you are coming —"

"Home!" she murmured. "I am coming home to my own land — the land I turned my back on twelve long years ago. And you," she continued, and again that speaking look in her eyes told of long buried sweetness lying there, "are showing me the road home." Clytie stepped impetuously forward and kissed

A FIGHTING CHANCE

her. The two had suddenly grown to understand each other.

All this had taken but a very few minutes. And now to work! Four of us were suddenly transformed into cooks and kitchen maids. Gently as possible I tied Althea to the Prince's massive, carved mahogany armchair and improvised with her handkerchief a gag which was not really put in place.

"Upset a chair or two," she commanded gaily and knock some of the papers from the table. I don't want to give up without an honorable struggle." Clytie surveyed the room with its disarranged furniture, its littered floor, and the pitiful spectacle of Althea, bound to the chair and smiling delightedly at us.

"The scene is a distinct artistic success," she pronounced approvingly. "And now, up with the curtain and let the melodrama proceed! Farewell till we meet in Belmania!"

We bade our captive good-bye.

"Till to-morrow or next day in Belmania," Clytie and I whispered almost in unison, then fled softly through the rooms out into the servants' hall which was dark and empty, down the staircase, along the lower hall to the corridor leading to the side door, and, after drop-

THE LOST PRINCESS

ping our servant's garb, I opened the door and, stepping into the street, came into violent collision with some one. In the light of the street lamp we stared at each other for an instant in startled amazement. I recognized him as the fat pastry cook into whose face I had, upon a memorable occasion, pasted a handful of soaking dead leaves, and that he recognized me was quite evident from the expression of horror which spread over his features.

With a high falsetto shriek of terror, he leaped past us into the dark corner and, falling over the little pile of garments which we had just shed, went down, groaning, to the cement floor.

THE LONG RIDE

CHAPTER XV

THE LONG RIDE

THIS was a totally unforeseen and most unfortunate incident that might ruin our entire scheme. It was an extraordinary coincidence that I should thus come face to face with the only one of the kitchen servants in the large throng of them who would have recognized me. Human forethought could hardly have anticipated this. With what impulse I do not quite know, I sprang back after the cook, but he rolled out of my way and, in the darkness, picked himself up and scuttled silently away.

"Hurry, we still have a chance!" I ordered, and pushed the others out into the street. At the curb were four superb saddle horses and a solitary groom who had evidently been well instructed by Althea, for, if he was startled at this unconventional rush of ours, he gave no sign. He was of ancient and striking appear-

THE LOST PRINCESS

ance. He did not wear livery but was in rough peasant's clothes. His hair and bushy beard were white and his eyes were deep set beneath exceedingly bushy eyebrows.

I heard a half suppressed cry from Francesco and the next instant he and the ancient servant were in each other's arms.

"Father!" he cried, "Father!" and "My boy! My boy!" sobbed the old man. It was Rudolfo, once gamekeeper of Baron Monverto that Francesco had told me about, still evidently faithful in the service of his dead master's daughter.

Francesco sprang away to his horse.

"To-morrow you are to follow with the mistress, father," he said, "and we will meet in Belmania," and we galloped away through the light rain, down the street. The Princess rode beautifully, Francesco as a matter of course, and Rosa, dumpy, frightened Rosa, murmuring prayers to the saints, managed to hold her seat. It was a case of necessity with her. We flung discretion to the winds. Speed only could save us now. An occasional policeman called on us to halt, but we rode at break-neck speed down alongside the wall of the palace gardens, out through several back streets and plunged into the park.

THE LONG RIDE

Now indeed were my thoughts in a turmoil! All in one day to be court-martialed, sentenced to death, sent to the death cell, released and suddenly thrust into the presence of Princess Clytie and Countess Beaupre in Prince Rafael's study, confronted with a chance to escape, given the responsibility of the welfare of these three others, and now in mad flight with immediate pursuit certain, it was small wonder that my thoughts were racing in unison with the hoof beats. If we were overtaken should I fight or surrender, because of those under my care? I could not expose Clytie to a fusillade of bullets, for instance. So one thing I determined, — to make as good a running as possible, and if we were caught up with, to surrender rather than fight. If I could only die fighting! That ghastly ordeal which would confront me on the morrow at dawn if I surrendered was a horror to contemplate. But Clytie's life *must not* be endangered.

So I encouraged the others and we spurred through the curving macadam road of the park, Clytie riding, silent and with set face, by my side, and perhaps brooding over similar thoughts to mine. She would be quick to realize in what extreme danger I now was, and

THE LOST PRINCESS

if we were captured there would be no rescue possible to follow for me.

The air was chilly and the mist thickened. Soon we left the park and the city lay behind us. The road now led straight away before us, across the plain, to the foot of the mountains. If we could only gain these we could have good hope of escaping. But soon I saw a faint yellow light creep along the roadway beneath us, lighting up its puddles and reaching farther and plainer into the distance. It was from the lamps of a motor car! I turned and saw these balls of fire devouring the distance between us, and at the sight I grew sick at heart. The remorseless and undiminished speed of their approach was terrifying, and the noble strength of our horses as they leaped onward seemed all at once pitiful and puny as the lights bored the darkness behind us. In desperation, and forgetful of my resolve not to tempt a return volley of bullets, I drew my revolver, ordered the others on, reined quickly in, wheeled and fired all five cartridges at the front tires of the motor. I heard an answering explosion, the angry voices of old Klauber and Baron Cassel, and then I turned and fled after the others.

“Now for a shower of bullets!” I muttered,

THE LONG RIDE

but they did not come, and then I realized that they would hardly dare to risk firing for the fear of hitting the visiting royal princess who was now so unconventionally taking her departure. I exulted as I noticed the light fade out of the wet roadway. The motor had stopped, maimed in its most vulnerable spot, and we again had a clear course before us. I soon overtook the others and explained things to Clytie.

"We are too young to die yet," I cried, exhilarated at the episode. "Life lies before us — ride! ride!"

Klauber and Cassel will probably be followed by some of the mounted police, I reasoned. I can imagine just how that noisy ass Cassel would shout at them to follow him if he met any, and their horses are fresh. Then a new plan came to me, and when we had crossed the plain I halted our little cavalcade.

"Listen!" I cried.

A faint sound of hoof beats was heard from behind us. Clytie looked imploringly at me.

"Quick!" I ordered, "ride straight into the woods. Follow me!"

And I left the roadway, scrambled across the ditch and forced the horse into the thick

THE LOST PRINCESS

woods. We left it at a point where it began to mount sharply up the mountain toward the frontier, but we had just passed a cross-road which ran down the valley along the foot of the mountains, and an idea had come to me when I noticed it. We broke our way for several moments into the thicket, then drew rein. The steaming horses were panting painfully, but we were now too far from the road for them to be heard.

"Oh, my back and legs!" mourned Rosa. "My arms are pulled off." Her hair had been shaken down and she looked the picture of woe as she wiped the rain from her face and groaned.

"Courage, sweet pudding!" comforted Francesco. "This is nothing to what will follow."

Jumping off my own mount and giving the bridle reins to Francesco, I crept noiselessly back toward the road, and soon, from my ambush, saw a little cavalcade of troopers, led by Klauber and Cassel, ascend the mountain road and pass on out of sight.

"They won't discover we have given them the slip till they reach the top," I said to myself, "and perhaps not then," and I returned to the others. Soon we were again in the road and

THE LONG RIDE

proceeded back to the cross-road, turned to our right, and galloped along with horses refreshed by their brief rest.

"More than a fighting chance now," I reassured Clytie.

"You wonderful man!" she murmured, just as she had done in the classic gardens of Isola Piccola that moonlight evening which now seemed so long ago. I laughed gaily.

"At Isola Piccola you wanted to be a part of the story-book in which, you said, all the rest of us were taking part. Do you feel now that you have succeeded in getting into it?"

"More than I could have believed possible," she answered, "but do tell me what the next chapter is to be."

"This road," I explained, "leads down the entire length of the valley, and there are several trails leading up from it over the mountains. Francesco probably knows where some of them are and how we can reach the frontier. There will be no pursuit this way and I think we shall be fairly safe. There are no towns nor even villages, and the peasants in any farm-houses we pass will not, of course, know who we are. We will ride till daybreak, then sleep in some cottage, and at dusk start again. Another

THE LOST PRINCESS

night's ride will see us safe in Belmania," I said confidently.

Hour after hour we rode through the bleak, drizzly night. I was beginning to feel intense fatigue and the reaction from the excitement of the previous day. The two women were unaccustomed to such severe physical exertion, but they kept up bravely. Francesco was the life of the party. He talked about the extraordinary meeting with his father, and laughed as he spoke of the fat pastry cook falling over the pile of clothes in the dark corridor.

"He shall make a wedding cake for us some day," he confided to Rosa; "a great white cake with a little Rosa and Francesco of icing standing upon the top, under a candy wedding bell."

Toward morning we came to an isolated farm, a stone house with an ample barn near it across the yard, and as we drew rein a benevolent looking old peasant came out of the kitchen door and crossed over to a wood-pile.

Francesco and I dismounted and he greeted us pleasantly. He knew nothing of politics or the war or of recent affairs at the capitol, and had no suspicions whatever concerning us. We were travelers, gentry and their servants. Gladly could the lady and her maid have beds

THE LONG RIDE

in the house. There were but two there, one for himself and his wife and the other for his son, who was away. Monsieur and his man could rest in the haymow in the barn and we could have some extra sheets if we desired. Breakfast? Certainly and quickly! Fresh eggs, black bread, and soup. Wine, too, of his own making. So I lifted the gallant little princess, half fainting with fatigue, from her jaded horse. Rosa plumped into the adoring Francesco's arms, and as the farmer's wife, who was equally hospitable, led them into the house, we men took the horses to the barn, groomed them carefully and made them comfortable, and then, with plenty of cold water from the well and dry clothes brought us by the farmer, Francesco and I made our toilet.

A little later the six of us, all in peasant costume, sat down to a steaming breakfast in the cottage kitchen; then the two women retired to sleep, and Francesco and I, after a much relished smoke, ascended the ladder in the barn to the fragrant haymow and slept the sleep of exhaustion till mid-afternoon.

THE FLAG IN THE FOREST

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLAG IN THE FOREST

AT dusk we were mounted and away. I rewarded our kind hosts well for their hospitality, and left them smiling and waving their hands to us at the gate. We were all a trifle stiff at first, and Rosa, who was anything but supple, almost creaked in her joints as Francesco heaved her up to the saddle.

"Come, Dumpling," he said, "another little gallop and I can take you to the finest pastry shop in Belmania and buy you ices and honey cakes."

The Princess and I rode together at first, with the servants in the rear.

"Have you heard anything of my grandfather?" she asked. "How was it he did not declare war against Rafael and send an army to rescue me? And why did I never hear from him directly? I gave up asking Rafael, for I knew he never told me the truth."

THE LOST PRINCESS

"His Majesty has been ill," I said gently, not wishing to alarm her by telling her of his mental condition, "and Rafael wrote to his ministers that you have been on a visit to Malvers and have been seriously ill with typhoid fever. They do not know that he carried you off violently. He has sent them weekly bulletins of your condition, signed by two court physicians. They are grateful to him for his care of you and have sent some troops to help him in his war against us. They are on the frontier somewhere now."

"Monster!" she cried. "*Our* troops going to fight *yours*!"

"During your grandfather's illness, you have been appointed Regent, but during your supposed illness, the Ministerial Council is acting for you. There is important work for you to do as soon as you can reach a cable office," I continued. "You can tell them a few things that will bring troubles to Rafael, enough almost to punish him for all the evil he has done. He did not reckon on the possibility of your escaping. But he did not reckon on a woman's hatred and a woman's wit." And I wondered if Althea was even then on her perilous way in full flight from Malvers.

THE FLAG IN THE FOREST

"What will you do when we reach Belmania?" she asked.

"What shall I do? Take you to the palace and then start for the front! Heaven grant that I can cross swords with Rafael."

A quick look of fear came into Clytie's face, but she was a soldier's child herself and said nothing for awhile. Then we talked of the Villa Clytie and our first meeting, and of the scented gardens of Isola Piccola and of each other. We did not speak of the future, however, and presently I fell behind to get some information from Francesco as to our route.

He told me that the most practicable pass over the mountains was the one that led past his boyhood home, Monverto Hall, the forests surrounding which he knew in every detail. He further stated the rather startling fact, that, from scraps of news he had gathered recently, he had concluded that the troops had gone that way. He said he thought that no declaration of war had been as yet actually made, and that he believed that Rafael had merely been massing troops near the frontier at a place where territory was in dispute — Monverto — and that Belmania, which always jealously watched every military movement in Malvers,

THE LOST PRINCESS

was probably massing a similar number of troops on her side of the boundary. Whether or not any actual warfare would follow was merely a matter of conjecture on our part. But under these conditions, hostilities might be started without any formalities preceding them.

We finally decided to take the trail leading past Monverto, because Francesco assured me he knew the country so well that we could easily avoid any troops if we should encounter them. The weather had cleared and the horses were in perfect condition, and we kept on, hour after hour, only stopping now and then for a brief rest. Each of our mounts carried saddle-bags in which were useful tokens of Althea's thoughtfulness — some toilet accessories, chocolate, a flask of brandy, biscuit, and even a tiny spirit lamp, tea and condensed milk. I had taken some bread and cheese from the farm and we had several cozy little picnics by the roadside. I realized the necessity of keeping all hands in good condition, as the most difficult part of our trip might perhaps still lie before us.

Soon after midnight we began to climb. We had reached Monverto Pass and it was easy

THE FLAG IN THE FOREST

to see, from the cut-up condition of the narrow road, that troops had just been over it. Francesco rode warily in advance, and not long before dawn, when we were near the summit, he waited for us to come up and announced that the army was not far ahead. Very soon he led us off from the road and we proceeded, single file, up various hardly discernible trails through the forest. Some of them in fact had been so overgrown from disuse that none not intimately familiar with the region could have detected the way. Occasionally we heard the note of a distant bugle call or the rumble of a caisson, but soon the mountain grew too steep for artillery. If there was to be a battle it would have to be of the old-fashioned kind in that wild spot, with plenty of hand-to-hand fighting and cavalry charges.

Our plan was to creep through the forests undiscovered by the Malvers troops and, after crossing the boundary, descend till we could find the Belmanian soldiers, where we would at last be in safety. Under Francesco's clever piloting we passed on in safety, and as daylight broke he turned to me and said:

"We have passed entirely around the Malvers men. In front of us is a little valley

THE LOST PRINCESS

which lies almost at the top of the range, but which has hills rising up from it on two sides. If there is a battle it will surely take place there. We must keep around to the right of it and stay always in the woods. We shall find our people on the other side. I know, for I have seen their scouts."

I knew that he could not be mistaken and a great load of responsibility seemed suddenly to fall from me. Could it be possible that I had succeeded in carrying off the Princess Clytie from the very stronghold of our enemy, and in the heart of his principality, to safety? As I looked back at it I was appalled at my audacity. It seemed hardly possible that I could have succeeded. But here we were, still fairly fresh after our long night's ride, — thanks to the occasional picnics en route, — riding joyously forward, every moment expecting to catch a glimpse of a familiar and dearly loved uniform. Presently Francesco gave a joyous shout and we all spurred eagerly forward. We were threading our way through a little glade which, far in front, now plainly seen in the growing light, opened into a tiny meadow carpeted with mosses and high grass. In the meadow was a group of white tents and

THE FLAG IN THE FOREST

the smoke from the camp fires rose in slender columns in the still morning air. In the center of this pleasant picture, hanging in soft, silken folds against its standard, was my country's flag, and at the sight of it I choked and almost sobbed with a rush of long pent-up feeling. Nothing in all my life that I can recall had seemed to catch at my heart-strings as the sight of that sacred flag, thus suddenly appearing in the heart of the silent forests.

Clytie, quick to read my thoughts, clutched my hand, and tears came to her eyes as we looked silently before us. Then, with a shout, we rushed forward, and the startled soldiers came tumbling out of their tents as we appeared. Not one of their pickets had noted our approach, so skilfully had Francesco guided us, and in another moment we had dismounted and were tumultuously pouring out our story to the astounded captain and the other officers and soldiers who crowded about us.

*THE APPARITION ON THE
BATTLE FIELD*

CHAPTER XVII

THE APPARITION ON THE BATTLE FIELD

AN hour later, accompanied by some non-commissioned officers, I was riding to the front, in search of my own regiment of guards, which, I was told, was here. By the field telephone service which kept all our forces in touch with each other, King Ernest, at camp headquarters, had been notified of our arrival, and after a hasty but refreshing breakfast the Princess and the two servants had started, under escort, for the city. An hour's ride on a fresh horse would bring her to a comfortable carriage, and in the valley down behind the range a motor car would transport her swiftly to the capital. Suitable uniform, accouterments, and a charger had been rushed to our camp for me, and the excitement of our arrival had so exhilarated me that all fatigue vanished and I reported myself, by telephone, ready for immediate duty.

THE LOST PRINCESS

As we cantered along through the woods, the sun was just rising above the hills. Presently we emerged from the forest and a scene burst upon us that would have thrilled the heart of any soldier. Before us lay a great open valley whose long neglected fields were overgrown with bracken and grass. From our elevation, the hills, denuded of timber, sloped gently down to it, their summits curving outward so that the valley was wider in the center than at either end. Across the valley rose a similar series of gentle slopes to the hills beyond. Far in the distance, at the end of the valley, was a massive stone mansion overgrown with vines. This I judged to be Monverto Hall. Partly discerned through the woods, covering our entire side of the hills, were our troops, regiments of mountaineers, mounted infantry, saber-cavalry, lancers and infantry. Bugle calls rang here and there, guidons and regimental flags twinkled, and messengers dashed to and fro along the edge of the woods. Only a few pieces of light artillery could be used. Across the valley the forests seemed fairly to bristle with armed men. Over all this martial scene, — the placid meadows below so soon to be o'er trampled and the bristling woods, the

APPARITION ON BATTLE FIELD

morning sunlight streamed, striking into fire the gun barrels and lance points which twinkled along the edge of the forests, and as I looked a sharp crackle of rifle fire was heard, but the smoke puffs were scarcely detected, for modern powder was used.

Then suddenly the woods on our side of the valley seemed to blossom into sudden life and give forth long lines of dun-colored figures who sprang from shelter and rushed down the slopes, now crouching behind furz bushes and rocks, now rushing forward a few yards, again flinging themselves on their faces and almost disappearing in the bracken. Farther away on our right wing, little groups of horses dashed boldly out, dragging light guns behind them. Bugle calls re-echoed, and near me a little telephone bell tinkled softly against a tree-trunk. The woods opposite likewise burst into life. Over there the uniforms were more showy and varied and consequently more plainly seen. Down the hills they dashed, more boldly and in greater numbers than ours, and the air was rent with an incessant crackling of rifle fire.

Digging spurs into my new charger I dashed along the hill crest toward the center of the long line. Presently on my right I heard a

THE LOST PRINCESS

subdued rushing sound, and through the woods, at full gallop, the troopers skilfully threading their way among the trees, came my own regiment, squadron after squadron, white horses, black and brown, sabers in their scabbards banging against the saddle girths, every man armed with his short-barreled magazine rifle of blue-black metal. As they saw me, the air resounded with their shouts, rifles were waved frantically in the air, and I drew rein and saluted as the dear old fellows raced past, yelling and laughing in my face. My officers surrounded me uproariously. They had been apprised of my coming and gave their welcome as only soldiers at such a moment can. At first I was too shaken with emotion to speak. Then I waved my cap and yelled with the best of them, and shook the friendly hands of those officers nearest me. Then orders from headquarters were given me and we wheeled to the right and swept along the crest of the hill to our position.

Ah! the exhilaration of that ride in the midst of my own troops, under my own flag once more and a glorious fight to come! Life! the air glittered with it. I seemed to feel the pulse of all the regiments beating in rhythm with

APPARITION ON BATTLE FIELD

mine. I flung the past away from me, there was no future, only the present moment existed and the blood rushed through my veins in ecstasy.

We took up our position just inside the woods. Down in the valley the battle was joined. There was no long-distance work there, no cold, calculating slaughter at distant range. These were hot-blooded soldiers of southwestern Europe whose ancestors, whose own parents, even they themselves, knew only the battle of personal, fanatical fighting. The two armies longed to grapple at each other's throats, to clash steel against steel, to ride to death or victory and fling science to the morning winds. They were bloodhounds unleashed, hungry and savage, and with hatred for their enemies and the blood lust glittering in their eyes.

A regiment of cavalry emerged suddenly from the opposite woods and raced in full view along the hills, two of our own were dispatched to encounter it and a squadron of Malvers lancers, fierce, long-haired fellows burst out of the woods to the rescue. Other troops, infantry and mountaineers dashed down the slopes on all sides and blossomed forth below

THE LOST PRINCESS

us in the valley. Higher rose the sun, a few shells soared into the sky and shrieked to earth. We were outnumbered slightly but our more scientific methods had their effect. Somewhere behind us King Ernest was personally directing operations and his mastery of the game was evident in every move. Every feint of Rafael's was met with a counter one, every charge repulsed. Now a squadron of horse dashed to the rescue of some weak spot; again, troops were withdrawn into the woods to be used again in an unexpected place. And still, quivering with impatience, our regiment waited concealed and chafing at the delay.

At last the order came and instantly the general plan of the great game being played all about me was obliterated from my mind. Action at last! We became but a unit, our great company, ordered to one spot, to do one thing as best we might. The valley, the hills, ceased to exist for us. All the world consisted of only this compact mass of horses and men, dashing headlong down the hill. I was conscious of the creaking of my harness leathers, the sweating side of the horse next to me as he brushed against my boot. In two long lines the animals seemed to form themselves in-

APPARITION ON BATTLE FIELD

stinctively, I at one end of the front one, with an officer and an orderly riding in superb ease beside me. Over the rocks and rough earth we rode, and over the bodies of many a fallen comrade. Soon we were on the floor of the valley and firing rapid and deadly volleys with our rifles into the enemies' ranks so near us. My ears were deafened with the yelling, the volleys, and the awful confusion of noise. The bugles blew again and again. We were sweeping all before us in our victorious onrush. Then suddenly a regiment of Malvers cavalry, followed by men on foot, came at us on the flank. Then some of our own men, panic-stricken, dropping their dead behind them, their wounded reeling drunkenly, smote us from the front and struggled to pass through us to the rear. We cursed and smote them, then swept to the left. I was kicked in the leg by a horse but felt no pain, my cap was gone and sweat blinded my eyes, my throat was hoarse from shouting and still we rode.

The Malvers troops fought like demons and poured out of the woods above in never ceasing numbers. More bugles — the retreat! Then I seemed to go mad with the rest of my men, I saw or knew nothing clearly, only that we

THE LOST PRINCESS

were out-fought, out-played, retreating slowly back across the space we had won at such cost of blood and strength. Agonized faces stared up at me from the earth and our horses trampled the wounded underfoot, but there was no time to think of them. We were being pressed steadily backward. I saw fear come to the faces of some of the men near me, some were already in full flight. The yells of triumph now came from the other side; we were being routed. Was it a general defeat or only an episode in our part of the field? There was no means of knowing. I noticed with especial horror, that the troops immediately opposing us were the Pavonian auxiliaries. Rafael had evidently held them in leash till he saw us weakening, and then had sent them against us to complete our rout. Bugles again — the retreat in double quick. The fight was lost and our army was beaten. The end of the world had come!

But no! suddenly a thrill of wonderment, almost of terror, seemed to sweep over our little army; then a murmur of astonishment which swelled into joyfulness. We had been crowded down to our end of the valley, and above us, sweeping down the hill to our rescue, rode —

APPARITION ON BATTLE FIELD

and oh! the indescribable glory of that sight! a splendid regiment of cavalry all in white, gleaming in the sunlight like the hosts of the Lord. Line after line of white horses, line after line of white uniformed riders, line after line of quivering, long-bladed sabers raised on high, swept downward, every man distinct in the sunshine. And at their head, riding at a full gallop, was the most astounding, the most thrilling, and altogether incomprehensible figure conceivable. There, seated upon a magnificent white charger, his long white hair and beard, soft spun as silver, streaming in the wind, reins loose on the horse's neck, both arms raised on high, one flashing a great saber and the other a silver helmet, chanting a mad pæan, rode King Theocrite of Pavonia!

On he came, Theocrite and his white hosts, with inconceivable ferocity and speed, and at this appalling sight the panic was stayed, the disordered masses of troops, cheering and singing, re-formed, and, following this heaven-sent apparition of the King's own bodyguard, led by the almost supernatural figure of the venerable leader, swept on, clear across the valley, slaughtering the enemy with awful havoc. At the first sight of the King of Pavonia thus

THE LOST PRINCESS

rushing to our rescue, the two regiments of his own soldiers who were engaging us in almost hand-to-hand conflict were absolutely dazed with astonishment. They found themselves opposing in battle their own king! With awe-struck and blanched faces they fled instantly, in confusion, and their flight naturally had a most disastrous effect upon the Malvers men. Thus by this extraordinary incident the very feature upon which Rafael had relied to win the battle for him proved his undoing.

On we pressed, the resistance every moment lessening. In the forefront rode the white regiment, and the helmet of Theocrite as he urged on his gigantic charger was seen by all. On, on we rushed, the valley was cleared, the enemy panic-stricken, routed, fled up the hills to the forests, leaving their dead and wounded behind. The science of warfare, the great game played by the two leaders, vanished.. This was medieval nay primeval—chaotic, irresistible, magnificent.

Caught in the spell of that magnetic personality — of the mad King Theocrite, I had pushed my horse to the very front of the onslaught and was close behind him, my troopers intermixed with his. The battle was over, the enemy vanished, still our little company pressed

APPARITION ON BATTLE FIELD

on. Still I took no heed of what went on beyond our immediate range of vision. Thus we came to a little hilltop, partially wooded.

The Malvers men had utterly vanished from the scene. Suddenly we rounded the top of the knoll, and there, about to dash to safety in the woods just beyond, we came upon Prince Rafael himself and his staff and the straggling remnants of his guard fleeing before us across the little open stretch. Rafael, on his big black horse, wheeled and faced us. He gazed for a moment, with a look of horrifying rage and venom, at the gaunt face of Theocrite, then his horse sprang forward at him. Rafael's saber flashed in the air; he lunged fiercely and the blade sank into the shoulder of the mad king. With a cry I leaped my horse through the air so that he literally fell upon him, the horse's head struck him in the face, his shoulder struck Rafael's mount full in the side, and with a shriek from both animal and rider they were hurled bodily sideways and fell in a heap, Rafael crushed underneath. In an instant a dozen sabers flashed about me and the troopers in fury had flung themselves to the ground and buried their blades in the crushed body at their feet.

THE LOST PRINCESS

I leaped from my horse and dragged them off. Rafael lay ghastly and motionless in a clump of ferns, partly concealed beneath the dead body of his horse. He was still breathing as I bent over him. Blood streamed from his head and body. He opened his eyes and recognized me. Then his eyes rolled and took in the lichen-covered rock beside him and the great trees overhead, in the center of whose foliage a patch of the sky was seen. His lips moved and I knelt to catch the words.

"The very spot," he whispered, "the very spot where it happened! Monverto! I am punished at last." He choked and coughed and his chest heaved once or twice. Then he shivered and lay still.

*HOW KING THEOCRITE TURNED
THE TIDE OF BATTLE*

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW KING THEOCRITE TURNED THE TIDE OF BATTLE

A LITTLE later, a silent procession marched slowly out from the thicket and turned back toward the valley. The sun was now high in the heavens. A vast silence reigned over the place where so recently man's passions had surged and death had stalked amid the clashing armies. For a space an awful wrath had wreaked its havoc there and brought destruction, and now the oppressive silence seemed intensified by the dissonant creaking of ambulances and the slow tread of their horses. Weary to faintness, my pulses still throbbing with the passion which had surged over me and from the effect of terrific physical energy expended, I looked down upon the mournful scene. There lay the green valley, ravished of its beauty, a pathetic reproach to the savagery of men. Its sweet fields were strewn with dead

THE LOST PRINCESS

and wounded, its grasses trampled and crushed. The red cross corps was busy everywhere and the wounded were being promptly ministered to. Here and there our shattered regiments were re-forming and marching slowly back up the hills facing us, and little knots of general staff officers were riding silently about surveying operations and giving orders in subdued tones. The enemy had been allowed to depart without pursuit, which would have been difficult in any case because of the contour of the country. The battle had been a decisive one and the entire valley was in our possession. There was no reason for invading Malvers territory.

We turned our steps toward Monverto Hall. I relinquished my regiment to the officer second in command and walked beside the litter on which lay the unconscious King of Pavonia. The surgeons had attended to him temporarily and assured us he would live. A little behind him came the body of Rafael covered with one of his own flags which had been captured. And so, in this strange company, myself slightly wounded in several places but quite able to walk, I came to the ancient castle which already knew so much of tragedy and of anguish.

KING THEOCRITE

The King's own surgeon attended to me and I slept heavily till dusk. When I awoke, an orderly brought me fresh under-clothing and my uniform had been made presentable. I had had nothing to eat since dawn and the bowl of hot broth which I drank quickly brought back my strength, and, with a decided feeling of comfort and contentment, I descended from the bedroom I had taken, to the main floor. A group of officers were standing, chatting in the hall at the foot of the stairs. They greeted me jovially.

"Well, Colonel Casamare," said one, wringing my hand, "you must have a dramatic strain in your make-up. After months of mysterious absence you appear in the limelight just at a time that the gallery would delight in."

"Yes, indeed," said another, "and you've occupied the center of the stage ever since."

"And slain the villain with your trusty sword," said a third. "Where in the world have you been? Come, give an account of yourself, sir!"

"Gentlemen," interposed another, "the Colonel will thrill us with his adventures after dinner. The King is in the library and wants to see him. Come on, old man, and get some

THE LOST PRINCESS

more medals. By Jove, you earned them, I imagine."

He took my arm and we crossed the hall to a large apartment opening from it, with walls covered with glass front bookcases, massive oak furniture, and a great open fireplace at the farther end where a log fire blazed. Before it, at a little table littered with papers, sat King Ernest.

He rose as I approached and warmly grasped my hand. He was a simple-mannered man with an entire absence of hauteur.

"Well, Colonel," he said, motioning me to a chair, "you arrived just in the nick of time. I am glad to see you. To-morrow you must report to me just what you have accomplished; but tell me now, before we go in to dinner, did you find the Princess Clytie?"

"I did, sir!" I replied, "and to-night she is safe in your palace in Belopolis."

"In Belopolis! Then you not only found but rescued her! Is she well?"

"Perfectly," I answered, "and I have much of importance to relate to you. But, if you will pardon me, how in the world did the King of Pavonia suddenly appear here at the head of one of your regiments? I can't understand it."

KING THEOCRITE

King Ernest laughed.

"That is a story that will also have to be postponed. Meanwhile, the war cloud has rolled away and — dinner is ready."

All the next day was occupied in active work. I was with my regiment, which in dead and wounded had lost heavily, the heaviest perhaps of any. Surveyors were marking the boundary line between the two states and Monverto Valley came entirely into Belmania once more. The dead were buried, the wounded — those who were able to travel — were sent home, a long line of skirmishers were deployed along the frontier and temporary camps organized there. There would be no further hostilities, that was certain. Ambassadors and their guard, under a flag of truce, were sent with the body of Prince Rafael to deliver it with full military honors to representatives of the Malvers army, and King Ernest was busy receiving reports and reorganizing the shattered regiments.

During this time I learned how it was that King Theocrite astounded us by so suddenly appearing, here in the battle, when I thought him insane, broken and ill, far away in Pavonia, Growing more and more restless at inactivity,

THE LOST PRINCESS

distressed by the uncertainty of the fate of his granddaughter, knowing that the messages concerning her from Rafael must be lying ones, and even seeking in vain for information as to my whereabouts from King Ernest, he suddenly reasserted his old-time independence and, one day, without informing his official family of his intentions, he boarded his great sailing yacht and laid his course for Belmania. In due time he arrived at our capital and became the guest of King Ernest, somewhat to the latter's embarrassment. But the venerable guest insisted on preserving strict incognito so that official receptions and entertainments were unnecessary. King Ernest told him of my starting on the perilous quest in search of the lost princess, and informed him that a little later my sailors had returned and reported that we had left Isola Piccola together but had been captured by Prince Rafael on his yacht. He knew that we were both kept in partial constraint at the palace at the latter's capital, but further than that he knew nothing. He reassured the old man as to the Princess's safety. Of course the diplomatic representatives from Pavonia in Belmania had informed King Ernest as to the Regency and the mental hallucinations of their King.

KING THEOCRITE

Theocrite had insisted on coming to the front in order to watch operations and King Ernest could not refuse, so he had been driven the last part of the way, where the trails were steep, in a little pony cart, and in the morning Theocrite had driven to the forest edge to overlook the battle. His attendant graphically told me how the old man had joined in the fight. He had been watching the engagement with absorbed interest, sitting in his pony cart, dressed in the uniform of the White Guards of which he was honorary colonel. When he saw the struggle going in favor of Rafael's forces and the Belmanian lines wavering, he showed great excitement.

"The harps are singing to me!" he murmured. "I hear the horrid discord of Rafael's soul — the battle chants of the soldiers! They deafen my ears, the music is full of discords. There is something lacking in it. It needs a certain strain — *I* shall supply it. *I* am the music master."

He sprang up from his seat. Beside him, silent, ready for instant action, stood, rank upon rank, the White Guard. Beside the pony cart was a petty officer mounted on an unusually large war horse, pure white like the others.

THE LOST PRINCESS

"Sergeant!" he spoke sharply, "dismount."

The astonished trooper obeyed.

"Your hand!" and the aged King stepped out of his cart, took the bridle and was helped into the saddle. Then he rode out in front of the astounded regiment.

"Men!" cried the King, his whole being seeming to radiate magnetism, so keyed up with excitement was he, "follow me and we shall save the day!" and he turned and dashed down the hill. No further orders were necessary. Like a great pack of greyhounds, the regiment followed; like a white cloud, charged with lightning, it swept down the hill.

That evening King Ernest summoned me to the library. We sat before the open fire and I told him of my visit to the island, the finding of the Princess Clytie, our escape, the fog, the capture, our life at the Palace, of Rafael, and of my court-martial and death sentence. Then I stopped abruptly.

"But how, under those fearful and hopeless circumstances, could you manage to effect your escape?" he demanded.

"Your Majesty, I had a friend at court. It was entirely through her friendliness and cleverness that it was arranged."

KING THEOCRITE

"Who was that?" he asked, "some one in the Prince's confidence who betrayed him?"

"Exactly that, but she was justified in doing so."

"Tell me about it."

I hesitated. I had reached delicate and dangerous ground.

"There was a woman," I said, "who for several years had been, as she thought, befriended by the Prince. She was his confidential secretary, a woman of station but stripped of her fortunes. I discovered that it was the Prince who had been the direct means of causing the death of her parents, who had treacherously and secretly taken her estates and who had robbed her of all of life's happiness. I was able to prove all this to her. In revenge she managed to effect my escape and I took the Princess Clytie with me."

"Who was it?" he asked inexorably, leaning slightly forward in his leather armchair and looking fixedly at me.

"When I fled from Malvers the first time," I replied, "I told you how a certain woman had so cleverly taken the packet of Diplomatic Correspondence from me after I had brought it safely across the frontier."

THE LOST PRINCESS

"The Countess Althea," he said softly.

"The Countess Althea de Beaupre," I replied.

For several minutes he looked into the flames. Was he seeing memory pictures of a beautiful young girl with long brown hair, I wondered? Then his eyes roved about the apartment and I knew it was repeopled to him with figures which had dwelt here years ago. For the moment Monverto Hall was thronged with the faces and scenes of other days.

"Did you learn all the events which transpired concerning her life here?" he asked.

"All the important ones," I answered, "and now she too knows them all. She knows the truth. Yesterday Prince Rafael died in the very spot where, twelve years before, the old Count Beaupre was murdered."

Another long pause. A log fell and I re-adjusted it.

"Where is the Countess de Beaupre now?" he asked.

"Probably in Belmania," I said; "she was to leave Malvers at once. She has shaken its dust from her garments at last."

The King rose and held out his hand.

"Good night," he said, "I thank you."

*THE PRINCESS CLYTIE SALUTES
THE NEW GENERAL*

CHAPTER XIX

THE PRINCESS CLYTIE SALUTES THE NEW GENERAL

MONVERTO HALL, beautifully situated at the end of the valley, stood in the midst of a lawn shaded with evergreens. It was of simple but massive style, built of smooth hewn brown stone and partly curtained with ivy. The public rooms on the main floor were substantially and comfortably furnished. The two-story entrance hall had its walls embellished with armor, and stags' heads with branching antlers. In the rear, opposite the entrance, the marble stairway rose to a landing half-way up, lighted by an immense stained-glass window. From this landing the stairway divided itself, turned and ascended on each side to the gallery over the front entrance. On the walls of this upper gallery hung massively framed, full length portraits of Monverto ancestors, in oil, and from this corridor the various suites of

THE LOST PRINCESS

bedrooms opened. Although the mansion had been seldom occupied of recent years, caretakers had kept everything in excellent condition. At present occupying it, beside the King, were several of his staff officers, and our servants who were private soldiers, and a few orderlies. King Theocrite, constantly attended by army surgeons and nurses of the hospital corps, lay in a bedroom in an ell which led off to the rear, forming the right wing of the building.

The following afternoon a general parade of all the troops was ordered, preparatory to sending as many of them as practicable, home. They were mustered in the most level part of the valley, near a patch of woods which concealed the rough, narrow road leading from the palace toward the pass, across the mountains to Belmania.

I rode at the head of my regiment, and after the march past the reviewing stand, where King Ernest and his officers gravely saluted the cheering but sadly depleted regiments, the line re-formed opposite him for the final dress parade. As the commissioned officers left their companies and regiments and rode forward for the final salute before dismissal, the King rode

PRINCESS CLYTIE

forward from his staff a few paces and ordered me to approach. I did so and saluted, wondering. My astonishment was genuine when, in clearly heard words, he announced that I had been promoted, for distinguished services to the state and for valor on the field of battle, to the rank of Brigade General and attached to his personal staff. Then the parade was dismissed, and a moment later, considerably confused, I was receiving the congratulations of my fellow officers. I had so recently been raised to the colonelcy that I hadn't the slightest thought of further advancement and could hardly believe that I was now a full-fledged General.

An hour later, as I dismounted before the Hall and entered, I was still, I imagine, rather absent-minded and scarcely noticed the rustle of feminine garments as I ascended the stairway to go to my room. Imagine my astonishment, then, as I suddenly looked up and beheld, awaiting me at the top of the stair, the Princess Clytie of Pavonia.

She stood straight and stiff and raised her right hand to her forehead in a funny little military salute.

"Greetings to the new General!" she cried, her eyes sparkling.

THE LOST PRINCESS

"Clytie!" I gasped.

"I saw it all from the woods," she said, "the parade and your promotion. How proud I was! We were in the road on our way here. And I have a pair of field glasses and saw your face when you received your new rank. How embarrassed you were! Why, you were not half as much embarrassed when you told me you loved me. Is it so much less of an affair to tell a woman you love her? But of course you have only been made a general *once!*"

"Clytie!" I cried reproachfully.

But there was no malice in her face and there was no one to see us and — * * *

Presently she gently freed herself and smoothed her hair.

"I have just been with Grandfather," she said. "He is very weak, but is perfectly conscious and clear in his mind. And how glad he was to see me!" Her voice broke. "The nurse would only let me stay a few minutes with him, but he is going to get better very fast now. Dear Grandfather, how he has suffered since that last night on the terrace at dear Villa Clytie! But we shall never be separated again."

"Tell me, did you have a hard trip to

PRINCESS CLYTIE

Belopolis?" I asked eagerly, "did you have a rest before you started to come here?"

"Yes, indeed, and I read all about the battle in the newspapers. And your name was in the headlines! And when I learned that Grandfather was here and had actually fought, himself — and so nobly — I couldn't wait another moment and — here I am!"

How fortunate it was that the corridor was still deserted! After another pause:

"Does King Ernest know you are here?" I asked.

"Yes, he is to receive us as soon as we are ready to come down."

"We?" I asked.

"Yes, we! Whom do you suppose came with me."

"Not — not —"

"Yes, Althea. She is in her room and will be here presently. And now hurry and brush your hair, and come down to see the sparks fly when she and King Ernest meet."

I hurried.

The reception of a royal Princess was naturally a matter of no small importance. The King, surrounded by his immediate staff, and in full dress uniform, gathered in the drawing-

THE LOST PRINCESS

room at the right of the entrance to the Hall, and the lower part of the stairway was lined with soldiers who presented arms. A military band was stationed in a nearby room and played softly as the Princess, accompanied by the Countess Althea de Beaupre, descended. As she came slowly down the great marble stairs, I felt a sudden pang as I watched her from where I stood behind the King. She was no longer the simple, merry, capricious little maid I had learned to love so dearly, but a proud, dignified woman of the high world, the patrician daughter of kings, receiving this homage with perfect serenity, as her right. She had evidently brought her luggage with her and was dressed in white evening attire, and she walked slowly across the hall and courtesied to the King as he came forward to meet her. Gone was the dryad of Villa Clytie! I saw before me a royal princess.

King Ernest welcomed her with his usual courtly but kindly grace, and then presented his officers to her. Then she turned and, holding out her hand to Althea, who stood just behind her, said:

"Your Majesty, I present the Countess Althea de Beaupre, who has accompanied me

PRINCESS CLYTIE

from your capital bearing an important document for you. She has recently been attached to the household of the late Prince Rafael, but has left Malvers and relinquished her allegiance to that country and seeks asylum under your protection."

With perfect composure Althea courtesied and with equal formality King Ernest raised her hand to his lips.

"I gladly welcome the Countess de Beaupre to our company," he said, "but it seems hardly fit that I should venture to welcome her to this house, since the house is hers by right and equity. It is she who should — and will, I trust, welcome us. It is her own home and we should ask her to allow us to be her guests in it." And he smiled at her winningly.

"Your Majesty, you overwhelm me with your kindness," said Althea. "The house and estate, it is true, once belonged to my family, but it no longer is in our possession."

"Then it shall be at once," replied the King. "Our recent success at arms has solved several problems and it shall be my first duty and my great pleasure to restore your property to you. The title deeds will be arranged as soon as possible. Meanwhile, we will not quibble as

THE LOST PRINCESS

to who is host and who is guest. The war cloud has vanished, His Majesty, your Grandfather," and King Ernest turned to Clytie, "is recovering from the wounds received during his gallant aid to our troops, and we shall all be happy and merry together. General, give the Countess your arm" — this to the Commanding General. "Casamare, let us go in to dinner," and, with the Princess Clytie, he led the way to the dining-room.

Later in the evening, when Clytie had gone to be with her grandfather, Althea came to me and said with some little constraint:

"Baron Casamare, when I left Malvers, I took with me the packet which once — it seems very long ago now — I purloined from you. If I had only known some things that I do now, I might have saved many unfortunate things from happening, but —"

"I understand fully," I hastily reassured her.

"I want you to give it now to King Ernest. It is why I came here. Please, please, it is only right that you should do so! It is entirely due to you that it is here now."

She drew it from a silken reticule she wore and handed it to me. I held it and looked at it musingly. Here at last was the packet

PRINCESS CLYTIE

which I had come so near to possessing several times, only to fail each time. And I at last received it from the woman who had been my first undoing. Then I realized that, if I had succeeded at first I should never have gone to Valdecosta, never have met the Princess Clytie, never have — the speculation was too complex. Fate and the packet had surely gone hand in hand together.

The King was standing by the fire in the library, and I fancied he had been regarding us through the open door.

"Come," I said, "let us go together and hand it to him."

But Althea laid a deterring hand on my arm. She suspected what I would say.

"No," she said, "let me go alone."

She took the packet and went in and closed the door.

I learned about what occurred later through Clytie. After a few conventional words they seated themselves before the fire, these two, thus brought so unexpectedly face to face, after many years, in the very spot where, in their youth, they had known each other so well. They were silent and constrained for a moment and then the woman broke the silence. She

THE LOST PRINCESS

did not use the "Your Majesty" of court etiquette, but there was some slight formality in her tone.

"It seems many more years than it really is, since I was here before. Then I was an impulsive young girl, now I am a woman, cold and bitter and cynical, I fear, in my regard for all things. You know how I was robbed of everything in the world I loved, but I did not know how, till a few days ago. But my happiness was ruined nevertheless and I suppose it is small wonder that I grew bitter. And perhaps the cruelest thing of all was that I myself was made cruel and unwittingly did a great injustice to those I should have known could not have so wronged me," and Althea looked up for a moment at her companion. "But I was very young at the time," she continued, "barely eighteen, and perhaps — no, I was absolutely to blame. I can find no real excuse in my heart. Do not think that I do not realize how much I wronged you, sir. And now I can only say that I know fully how unjust I was, and that I am sorry, and that if, some time, you can to some extent forgive me, — no, please let me speak, — it will make me less unhappy. And now I bring you a peace-offering

PRINCESS CLYTIE

and beg that there may be peace between us." She smiled sadly and handed him the packet.

"This is the Packet of Diplomatic Correspondence," she went on, "which Prince Rafael endeavored to use against you and your kingdom. Had he lived and had the battle not been so disastrous to him, he would have made evil use with it to press on with the war. I do not know the present political conditions, but I am sure it would have been dangerous to leave this in Malvers where his successor could have found it, so when I came away I brought it with me to give to you. By right Baron Casamare should have brought it to you, for it is really entirely due to him that it is here. It makes little difference, however, who hands it to you, since you know the facts."

King Ernest turned the parcel over and over in his hands, then tossed it into the fire.

"It will do no more harm in the world now," he said, "and that incident is closed. I thank you for bringing it to me."

Together they watched it burn to ashes among the logs.

"I understand you entirely and forgive you with all my heart," he said. "I too was young, but I should have acted differently. I too want

THE LOST PRINCESS

to ask for forgiveness. I should have realized that circumstances compelled you to act as you did, and not have rested till I had vindicated myself. Let us try and forget the past and begin anew." And he looked eagerly at her. She was still the beautiful, fresh-hearted young girl in his eyes.

Althea rose. "Thank you," she said. "Time has not made you less good and less generous. Good night."

"Good night," he said blankly, and she left him staring after her for many minutes after the door had closed on her.

*THE RETURN IN TRIUMPH TO
BELOPOLIS*

CHAPTER XX

THE RETURN IN TRIUMPH TO BELOPOLIS

"I CANNOT understand it," I said.

"Cannot understand what?" asked Clytie.

"Cannot understand why Althea is acting as she does."

"How is she acting?"

"Why, you know as well as I. Here is a woman who, years ago, was in love with a young man. She misunderstood him, believed evil things against him that were untrue, then, recently, she found out her mistake, was perfectly capable of seeing that all these years the man had been true to her and had never cared for any one else; she comes all the way up here to the mountains to plead forgiveness, is forgiven, and then what? Does she allow him to gather her fondly into his arms and order the wedding bells to be let loose? Not a gather — not a bell! She treats him as if she were not sure that they

THE LOST PRINCESS

had been properly introduced. Why, she avoids him persistently!"

"Oh, excellently, typical man!" mocked Clytie. "How deep thy learning in the ways of the world and yet how shallow thy wisdom! There is one subject that I fear is beyond you and that is — woman. You will never learn to know it."

"Isn't there *one* woman I have learned to know?"

"You are learning, but are still in the alphabet."

"Then teach me one letter so that I shall know it by heart, and I will be content."

"One letter only? Which one?"

"U. Tell me dear, do you love me?"

"Where have I heard that before? — it sounds familiar."

"Clytie, sweet, I don't care about Althea and the King. I don't care what is the matter with her. I don't pretend to be subtle, so let us not talk about them but about ourselves."

We were riding together through the superb evergreen forests which surrounded Monverto Hall. The afternoon was cold and bracing, with a spice of frost in it, and Clytie's cheeks glowed ravishingly. During the last day or

THE RETURN IN TRIUMPH

two we had had but few chances to be together, for she could hardly be lured from her grandfather's bedside. He was steadily improving and in a few days we were all to return to Belopolis.

The King was busy with military and state affairs and a satisfactory peace with Malvers would probably be arranged. But all his time was not given to work and he was decidedly perplexed at Althea's attitude toward him. She was always perfectly agreeable and the new life here in the mountains was evidently doing her much good. Color and animation were coming back to her face and she was more vivacious. Traces of sweetness revealed themselves fleetingly, and we began to see, beneath her calm *savoir faire*, a gleam of delightful human nature occasionally. But toward the King she was persistently and discouragingly distant and I could see that it troubled him. I knew the strength and depth of his big heart, of the love lying buried but not forgotten there all these years, and the dreamy look which I used occasionally to see in his eyes, the touch of wistfulness in his manner, told me that romance lived in his nature. He was a poet who achieved poems rather than wrote them, a

THE LOST PRINCESS

dreamer who dreamed of a wise and beneficent government for his people, and he was, withal, a man who strove to make his dreams come true. So his people were prosperous and happy, his government economical and progressive, his methods modern and practical. His realm, so small as to be scarcely noticed by the larger powers, had, of late years, emerged from medievalism and was now essentially a part of the Twentieth Century. But the King who could thus discern the hearts of his subjects with such insight was baffled by the one in all the world whom he longed most to understand.

And so the days passed and soon we departed for home. King Theocrite, wan and thin, but with his blue eyes burning more brightly than ever, made the trip in a carriage. The Princess Clytie rode with him and the rest of us went on horseback. Althea de Beaupre, who was now once more in possession of her old home, her forests and farms, with new servants in the old Hall, waved us farewell from the portico as we rode away that brilliant early winter morning. At the edge of the forest, standing, hat in hand, stood old Rudolfo, once more gamekeeper of the great estate.

THE RETURN IN TRIUMPH

The entire population of the city seemed to be in the streets as we entered it. The houses along our route were brilliantly decorated, and King Ernest received a royal welcome after the short-lived war. The acclamations were no less enthusiastic for Theocrite and his devoted granddaughter, and it was pleasant to see the old man's gratification at the demonstration. Surely no visiting monarch was ever welcomed more heartily.

KING ERNEST TAKES THE HINT

CHAPTER XXI

KING ERNEST TAKES THE HINT

THE next few days were full of many jolly happenings for me. The dear old Duchess gave a large dinner to me in honor of my becoming a General, and took occasion slyly to quiz me on my romantic quest of the lost Princess.

"He is our complete knight errant," she confided, across me, to one of General Bloc's daughters who sat on my left. "All you have to do is to press the button and off he goes, only instead of riding in armor, with lance set to meet all comers, he uses submarines and wireless telegraph and, for aught I know, flying machines. If you have a mysterious princess to rescue, or a villain to obliterate, just press the button."

"Which button?" asked Mlle. Bloc interestedly, regarding my new uniform."

"The one over his heart, of course, just at the right of the eighth medal," said the Duchess.

THE LOST PRINCESS

"I fear the Duchess is somewhat piqued," I answered audaciously, "because her very evident plans regarding you and me have not developed more successfully."

"Indeed, she is too clever a social diplomat to allow any mere man to suspect her plans," laughed Mlle. Bloc; "if she did anything to make you suspect that, she probably had an opposite scheme in mind."

"If she did, I refuse to fall into the trap. Let's be friends in spite of her!"

"Agreed," said Mlle. Bloc, "let's defy her!"

"But General," broke in Colonel Schwartzstein, "do tell us about this mad King of Pavonia and his charming granddaughter. What are those harps he prated about before he unlimbered and went into action that day? Is he music mad or what?"

"Music mad or not," I replied, "he certainly struck the keynote. He changed what might have been a dirge for us into a hymn of victory."

"By Jove, it was magnificent!" cried the Colonel. "I saw the whole thing and I never beheld such concentrated ferocity in my life. No wonder the beggars ran!"

"But the Princess, tell us of the Princess," persisted the Duchess, passing me the salted

KING ERNEST TAKES THE HINT

almonds. "We have no opportunity to judge for ourselves. Her grandfather is too ill for the King to arrange any social functions in her honor, so we must look to you for information."

"Can you expect a mere man adequately to describe any woman?" I asked.

"Try it," they urged.

"Well," said I, slowly raising my wine glass, "she is the most exquisite and adorable of women. I can't think of any further details."

"Indeed!" said the Duchess, glancing at me. "I think none other are necessary. Your word picture is complete." Then, under the table, she tapped me gently on the knee with her fan.

It was delightful to be at home again those days. I reveled in the sense of being among my own people and my new duties at the war office and the social life of the capital kept me pleasantly busy. I ran down once or twice to my seacoast estate to see my sister, and while there Francesco confided to me that he was soon to marry Rosa and bring her there to his cabin.

One day I received orders to repair to the palace as King Theocrite desired to see me, and I found him in an easy chair in his room look-

THE LOST PRINCESS

ing very frail and old. He greeted me with affection, pressing my hand warmly.

"We have sent to Valdecosta for a cruiser," he said, "and my granddaughter is going to take me home to die."

"Your Majesty!" I cried.

He smiled.

"I must sit once more on the terrace of Villa Clytie," he continued. "I want to smell the fragrance of the orange trees and the hybiscus, to arrange my laboratory and hear once more the music of my harps. Clytie will be always by my side and together we will look off over the water and sit in the sunshine. My time is drawing near, my wound will not heal. I am glad I came and avenged the insult of Rafael. Peace now lies between us all and we have you to thank for many things. And now what is this I hear about you and her?"

His blue eyes seemed to search my face, but not unkindly.

"I love her," I said, "as a man should love a good woman. But I am not of royal blood."

He was silent for a moment.

"We are living in a new era," he said, "the old order is changing. Men are judged and received for what they are. When I am gone,

KING ERNEST TAKES THE HINT

the Princess Clytie will be Queen of Pavonia. She is young and needs other help than what her ministers can give her. Your King has told me of your family and I am satisfied with it and with you. You know you passed before my harps," and he smiled in such a way that the thought crossed my mind that he was now sane, even in regard to them, and that this allusion to them was half whimsical. "My people already know of your fame and how much you have done for us all," he continued. "They will welcome you. I shall die happy knowing that you will become, in due time, Prince Consort of my little realm."

He pressed an electric button.

"Tell the Princess Clytie I should like to see her," he said to the servant who appeared.

A moment later Clytie entered, looked quickly at us both, then came forward. The old man took her hand and mine and brought them together.

"Take good care of her, my boy," he said, "and love her as she deserves. My blessings on you both."

He spoke quietly, not as a king arranging an affair of state, but as a feeble old man, con-

THE LOST PRINCESS

trolling well his emotion and thinking only of his granddaughter and her happiness.

I took Clytie in my arms, raised her face to mine, and kissed her. Then, as she hid her face on my shoulder:

"My darling," I said, "your Grandfather is going to trust you to my care. You know how I love you, faithfully and with my whole heart. The world grew beautiful to me when I met you and life a noble thing. You know already that love came to me in the gardens of Villa Clytie and you have let me look into your heart. His Majesty has made it possible for me to ask you, now, before him, will you be my wife, sweetheart?"

Clytie lifted her dear eyes to mine, trustfully, confidently.

"I will be your wife, Karl," she murmured, "for I love you truly."

And for several minutes there was silence in the room.

A few days later the Belmanian cruiser arrived at our seaport and preparations for moving King Theocrite as comfortably as possible were completed. Clytie and I, because of Court etiquette, had not as many opportunities for being together as I could have wished,

KING ERNEST TAKES THE HINT

for the news of our engagement was not to be made known at present. But we contrived to meet frequently and we sometimes spoke of Althea and King Ernest. Finally, Clytie remarked that the situation with them was absurd, and announced that she would take matters in her own hands. And this she did in a characteristic way. She had a tête-à-tête with King Ernest and confided to him our happiness. Then after his warm congratulations she said:

"But I am much disappointed in you, sir."

"That is not surprising, but, may I ask, in any way in particular?" he replied smiling.

"I have been told a sweet little pastoral," she remarked, "of a charming young maiden with brown hair who rode through the forests like a Diana, and of a proud young Prince who often went to her mountain home to ride with her. They were very young, but not too young for romance to come to them, there in the ever-green forests, years ago — but not really so many years after all," she said abruptly. "Then Tragedy and Sorrow came and Romance was driven away, and the world, empty and drear, lay between them. But the youth never forgot the maiden and the maiden never forgot the youth, and after a long time they met again

THE LOST PRINCESS

and their eyes had been opened to what they both had been blind to. And Romance came back, but the man turned his back on her. He would not see her, yet there she was standing wistfully at his elbow."

"But suppose it was the woman who would not see her?" asked King Ernest.

"The woman!" cried Clytie hotly, completely forgetting her allegory, "it is always the woman, because the man is too stupid to know that it is entirely his fault! How could Althea have done otherwise after she had come all the way back to you, confessed her mistake and begged your forgiveness! Of course she had to do that because it was her duty. And having done it, she was panic-stricken. Why didn't you compel her to give you her love if you loved her! Why didn't you ride rough shod over all obstacles, straight to her castle, and beat down her guard and run off with her! That is the way a man should woo a woman."

At this surprising outburst, King Ernest gazed at her excitedly. His eyes shone with eagerness.

"Do you really mean that she —"

"Never mind what I mean! Ride straight to Monverto Hall and find out for yourself."

KING ERNEST TAKES THE HINT

The King sprang from his chair, his face was flushed, his eyes glowed with a light that had not been in them for years. He paced up and down the room for a moment, with a new buoyancy in his step.

“I’ll do it!” he cried.

***ROMANCE COMES BACK TO
MONVERTO HALL***

CHAPTER XXII

ROMANCE COMES BACK TO MONVERTO HALL

A FEW days later two horsemen, a gentleman and his servant, might be seen riding rapidly through the evergreen forests which surrounded a peaceful valley. They followed the narrow road that led along the crest of the hills and drew rein before a stately, ivy-clad stone mansion. It was midwinter, but the weather was not cold, and a young woman who happened to emerge from the doorway, clad in brown riding habit, seemed startled at the unexpected appearance of the visitors.

"Your Majesty!" she cried, "what brings you to Monverto valley at this season?"

The young man threw himself from his horse, doffed his soft hat and bowed low over the lady's hand.

"I have come for a few days' rest from the cares of state," he said, his face glowing with the exertion of the long ride. "Will you not

THE LOST PRINCESS

take me in and let me forget them? I want to ride through these forests just as I used to do with you, and to learn to be young once more. Will you play with me?" and he looked at her eagerly.

She gave him a quick searching look and a sudden color came to her cheeks. Althea de Beaupre had grown decidedly younger in appearance since the King had seen her last, and he noticed with delight that the unnatural cynical expression in her face had vanished.

"Let us drop formality and be just Althea and Ernest once more," he said softly. His servant had disappeared with the horses and the luggage, and the two were alone.

"Come in," she said simply, but with a slight return of coldness. "Madame Schwartzenstein is visiting me and will share her coffee with you; she is just now breakfasting."

And so that day and the next they took long horseback rides through the splendid forests, and talked a little of old times but mostly of the present. He told her of his work and ambitions, of the new treaty of peace with Malvers which Rafael's cousin, a well-meaning young fellow who had succeeded him, had just signed, and she told him of how she

ROMANCE COMES BACK

was rapidly restoring her estate to its former prosperity.

"All these years that I have worked for my people," the man said as they sat alone together before the library fire on the second evening, "I have tried to think how you would have wished me to do, had you been there. In a way I was somewhat removed from the active life of other men and protected, as a king even in a small land like mine must be, yet I have studied my people closely and given them the best government I knew how to. It has been a man's work and there is a man's work yet to do. And all these years I have remembered those glorious days when you and I, Althea, loved each other here at Monverto — for we did love each other, did we not? I have never ceased to miss you and to rebel at our separation, and now that I see you once more, I can never let you go again. Althea dearest, come, give me your hand — there! I *must* have you, my dreams *must* come true now. You and I shall make up for the lost years and be happy once more. Althea, Althea, love, forget everything but that I love you! Let us forget the last few years and, together, you and I, be happy in the present. I need you, we need

THE LOST PRINCESS

each other, what else is there to be considered?"

He was beside her in the great settee and the firelight glowed on her cheek and sparkled in her eyes. Suddenly before she spoke he took her commandingly in his arms and held her close and helpless in a long embrace. He stroked her wavy brown hair and kissed her face. Then he released her and she looked at him wonderingly. All her reserve had been swept away. The shadow of the last few years fell from her, her self-consciousness was gone, she was the old Althea once more, her pulses throbbing, her chest heaving, her face radiant and girlish. Trembling slightly she raised a hand to her hair.

"I never imagined you could be like that," she said.

He seized both her hands.

"Sweetheart," he commanded, "tell me you love me! Quick!"

The love light sprang into her eyes.

"I —" she began.

But she had no opportunity of saying anything further.

*THE POMP AND PANOPLY OF
PEACE*



CHAPTER XXIII

THE POMP AND PANOPLY OF PEACE

THE brilliant spring sunshine beat down upon the public square before me as we emerged from the twilight of the cathedral. On the three sides facing us, the cream-walled, terracotta-roofed houses radiated it and the scarlet and gold decorations which draped them glowed in oriental splendor. There were no market carts, piled with yellow cheeses or flowers or spring berries there to-day, but the same trim little bay trees were there, casting their dark shadows on the white pavement, as when I first saw the place. So, too, were the throngs of peasants, but to-day, instead of the incessant chatter of bargaining at the booths, cheers rose on all sides as we appeared. Gay awnings, flowering window boxes, windows crowded with eager faces, even the roofs dotted with spectators, in long symmetrical lines, encompassing the entire square, the troops, silent,

THE LOST PRINCESS

statuesque, all at the salute — this is what greeted us as we stood on the cathedral steps. The broad-columned portico of the law courts opposite us were filled with rank behind rank of guards, their silver helmets and long cavalry swords shining in the sunlight. Overhead, in the campanille, the wedding bells were pealing, and through the open doorway stole the strains of music from the great organ.

By my side, in white lace gown and veil, with orange blossoms from the gardens of Villa Clytie and with her jeweled coronet upon her head, with her hand resting tremblingly upon my arm, was Queen Clytie of Pavonia, and she glanced shyly up at my face to see how I took in the brilliant scene before me. Coming crowding out behind us were the members of the Diplomatic Corps in their blue uniforms embroidered in gold, and just in the rear of us, a little to one side, eagerly noting and enjoying the animated panorama, stood King Ernest of Belmania and Queen Althea.

The bells ceased their ringing and from the harbor-front forts, cannons boomed with the royal salute. I raised my helmet, the Queen bowed slightly to her adoring subjects, and the sky seemed cleft with the shouting and the

POMP AND PANOPLY OF PEACE

cheers. Then, slowly, we descended the steps upon the crimson carpet to the state coach with its six white horses, its footmen and postilions, and presently were driving slowly across the square toward the city palace. Behind us, in another state coach, came our royal visitors and the carriages of the officers of state, the families of the legations, and the flower of the nobility, the army, the navy, and the judiciary. Valdecosta was wild with happiness and our way to the palace was strewn with flowers. At one place a great group of school children were singing; at others the representatives of the trades guilds, and to all, Queen Clytie, her cheeks glowing rosy red, smiled and waved her handkerchief — the lace one she had bought from me at Isola Piccola, while I sat by her side with bared head in perpetual salute. It was high noon, and as we drove down the esplanade which overlooked the harbor, where, below us, the shipping was gay with a myriad of tiny pennants and from among which a constant booming of guns arose, I suddenly pressed the hand of my bride and motioned to her with my eyes to look ahead. There, curving in a graceful arc, stretched the shore line with its soft, spring green foliage suffused here and there

THE LOST PRINCESS

with the tender pink of the plum blossoms and the flowering almond, and far in the distance, perched at the top of its gray cliffs, we caught a momentary glimpse of a point of white, like a moonstone in a bowl of malechite. It was Villa Clytie.

Then I forgot all else but the entrancing figure at my side. I presume I continued to salute as we drove slowly toward the city palace behind a company of household troops, but I saw and thought of only her. What were all this acclamation and excitement to me! *She* was by my side and that was all there was to think of in the world. Was she a Queen and I a Prince Consort? It mattered not, we were man and wife, and whether it were to a cottage or to a palace we were going I gave no thought. The seas that had lain between us would separate us no more, and she and I, alone, all, all alone together, had just heard our wedding bells peal and now we were going home.

Over a year had passed since she had sailed away from Belmania with the dying Theocrite, and I had only seen her once during all that time. It was when I made an official visit, a year after the old king had died, — lying, as he had wished, on his couch out upon the ter-

POMP AND PANOPLY OF PEACE

race, with his grandchild at his side, the scent of the orange blossoms in the air and the harbor with its white sails lying far below him. I had come to be present at the coronation of Clytie and the ceremonies attending her proclamation in which she chose her Prince Consort.

Suddenly I was recalled to the present by our arrival at the city palace, where we alighted, and standing side by side in the state reception room under a canopy of flowers, we received our guests. A little later, the wedding banquet was served in the vaulted-roof dining hall, with its high, oaken wainscoted walls, its armor and portraits. At the Queen's right I sat, at her left King Ernest. Queen Althea, in radiant spirits, was at my right, and on the other side of the King was the charming old Duchess, who, with several other guests of Ernest, had come to Valdecosta with us on his yacht. About us, at the great round table, was a brilliant gathering, the women in court costume, all the men in full uniforms, with their orders and insignia sparkling on their coats.

"The only regret I have," said the Duchess to Clytie, "is that I never had an opportunity of meeting the fairy Princess. In Belmania they kept you mysteriously hidden, and now

THE LOST PRINCESS

when, at last, I see you, behold! you are a fairy queen! But I knew exactly what you would look like from General Karl's — I beg his pardon, from the Prince Consort's description of you."

"Indeed," exclaimed Clytie, "how did he describe me?"

"It would be impossible adequately to describe her," said King Ernest, looking at her in frank admiration.

"Nevertheless, it was a masterly word picture," said the Duchess mischievously. "I never knew the boy to be so eloquent before."

"It couldn't have been a complete description," I remarked, "because I haven't learned it all yet. There is more to describe all the time."

"When I first knew him," said Clytie, "he was the hero of a story-book and I never could get him to tell me the story. After a time, however, he let me come into the pages with him and we had some exciting chapters together."

"And I didn't know," I remarked, "that the story was going to turn out a romance."

"I think he should be called 'The Master Novelist,'" said Althea.

"A health to the Fairy Queen!" cried King

POMP AND PANOPLY OF PEACE

Ernest, rising and lifting high his glass. "To the Fairy Queen and the gallant Prince Consort! To the Lost Princess and to him who found her!"

Then toasts were drunk to our royal visitors and to the friendship of the two lands, now linked so closely together, and then a commotion arose at the other end of the hall and a small procession of servants in gala livery approached us escorting a very much embarrassed pastry cook in spotless white, bearing proudly aloft an immense wedding cake, rising tier upon tier of frosted architecture to a tapering summit. Queen Althea touched my arm and called my attention to its bearer. He was looking at me with eager, half-frightened eyes, but with suppressed merriment lying within them. There was something familiar about him as he drew nearer. Then he deposited the gigantic cake before us on the table, and I noticed that about the edge of the platter was a garland of oak leaves preserved in wax. I gave a surprised start and an exclamation.

It was the fat rascal into whose face I had plastered that handful of wet leaves, scooped up from the copper cornice gutter that night when I first escaped from Malvers palace and

THE LOST PRINCESS

who later, had given the alarm when I ran off with the Princess Clytie. As I recognized him, Althea and King Ernest laughed, and the pastry cook bowed awkwardly and smiled with evident embarrassment.

"Ha!" I cried, "My old friend, the enemy! And he brings a peace-offering! It is a noble one and I accept it."

Then, rising and taking the wreath of wax leaves from around the cake, "Kneel!" I commanded.

The cook knelt and I placed the leaves upon his head over his white cap. It was so large that it hung down at the back, like a misfit halo.

"I commission you, Sir Pastry Knight," I said, "if ever I try to run away from here, to sound as many alarms as you choose. And until I do, remain with us and be as faithful to us as you were to your former master."

And I sat down amid much merriment.

"That was one of your clever doings, bringing him all the way here," I said to Queen Althea, "and it was certainly a master stroke."

That afternoon there was a review of troops on the parade ground. Clytie had exchanged her wedding gown for a riding habit of military cut and looked exceedingly smart in her long

POMP AND PANOPLY OP PEACE

plumed chapeau and her insignia, and I sat my horse beside her, her representative as Commander-in-Chief of the Pavonian army. It was a superb spectacle. With us, also mounted, were the King and Queen of Belmania and our combined staffs, and before us, on the brown, level parade ground, with the long lines of low barracks in the distance, swept, company after company, squadron after squadron, horse and foot, guns, commissariat and medical corps, The soldiers of the young queen. The dust rose in a brown haze and scintillated in the sunshine, the burgeon of spring swelled in the breasts of us all, and the pomp and panoply of arms, thus in peace assembled, was a magnificent token of the virility of the little nation which was thus adopting me.

Later in the day we too, Clytie and I, left the city to its revels behind us. In one of the simple victorias sent down from Villa Clytie we drove slowly out from the city streets, lined with troops, who gave us a farewell salute at its gates, along the dearly loved road, threading its peaceful way among the olive and lemon groves and the terraced vineyards. The sun was drooping low in the west, and Clytie, a little weary with the excitement of the day,

THE LOST PRINCESS

nestled against my side, her gloved hand in mine. We spoke but little, but watched the western light dapple the road with shadows as it streamed through the foliage which arose on the other sides of the walls which bordered the road. The city lay behind us and we were to pass our honeymoon as simply as possible at Villa Clytie.

When we reached the entrance to the ancient garden, with its mossy statues standing silently in their foliate niches, the same little girl who had first swung open for me the gates of paradise was waiting for us. She was dressed all in white and there were flowers in her hair. She smiled and courtesied and I sprang out, raised her in my arms and kissed her.

"This is the little fairy who showed me the way to fairyland," I said to Clytie, and she too kissed her and gave her some of her flowers.

That evening we sat alone together, in the moonlight upon the terrace. The lights from the windows of the villa cast long yellow bars out upon the marble pavement, the paths leading away under the live oaks and olives in the garden in the rear were silent and scented with fair flowers and fair memories. Far below us lay the sea and along the shore twinkled the

POMP AND PANOPLY OF PEACE

lights of the peasants' homes. It was an ideal scene of beauty. In these classic walks, Petrarch might have sung to his Laura, Virgil have dreamed an Aeneid of dreams, and Dante written odes to Beatrice, but I was Virgil, Dante, and Petrarch all in one to-night, and all the romance of the past had only just now reached its culmination.

"Karl," whispered my love, as we sat side by side in our favorite seat on the parapet overlooking the sea, "I am so glad you let me into the story-book. It has been a beautiful story and the ending is the best of all."

"But this is not the ending," I replied, holding her hand to my lips, "this is only the beginning."

THE END

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